THE STORY OF NAAMAN

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"Many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet, and none of them was cleansed saving Naaman the Syrian."

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PREFACE.

THE design of this little book is to present the truths of the Gospel embedded in the Old Testament story of Naaman the Syrian in such a way as, with God's blessing, to arouse and convince the careless, guide the anxious enquirer, and instruct the servant of the Lord.

In the outset we see how all success in life is unsatisfying so long as we are under the power of sin; while, on the other hand, godliness wherever found is profitable unto all things. Then our attention is directed to the means which man devises to obtain God's salvation, but only to witness the rejection of all his plans, and his huge disappointment. Next we have the counsels of common sense, and the blessedness and gratitude of the soul that bows to God's appointed means. Then lastly, as illustrations of unfaithfulness and faithfulness to the grace of God, we have the story of Gehazi, and the after history of Naaman, so

far as it can be conjectured, from the few hints that the Scripture record yields.

Thus we have, in small compass, a spiritual biography. The darkness of the sinner's state broken in upon by the light of grace and truth; the anxious soul groping after the light, but through pride and ignorance making great mistakes; then the proud heart humbled, and reasonable and willing to submit to the ordinance of God; next, the perfect salvation of the submissive soul, and the joy and gratitude which it brings; and lastly, the adorning of the doctrine of God's saving grace by a life of obedience and consecration.

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I.

THE SUCCESSFUL CAPTAIN.

"Vanity of vanities; all is vanity."

COME with me to the most ancient city on earth, and perhaps the most beautiful. Abraham in his westward pilgrimage may have passed through its streets; for the trusty steward of his house, and his purposed heir, was Eliezer of Damascus. Isaiah speaks of it as "the head of Syria," Mohammed compares it to Paradise, Lamartine sees in it "a predestined capital," Milman extols it as "the Queen of cities"; and though older than history, it stands to-day as if with the dews of youth upon it, fresh and fair and fragrant as its own unrivalled rose. The "eternal city," it might well be called, for it has been for centuries a centre of abiding influence and attraction in Syria, that cradle of mankind. There flourished, from time immemorial, the arts of war and peace, for it was early celebrated not only for its toughened steel, but also for its textile fabrics and its flowers and fruits. To the ancient warrior, a Damascus blade was his trustiest friend; to his noble dame, its damask silks, richly

brocaded, were the perfection of beauty; and to their little children, its small and deep dyed purple plum and gorgeous damask rose were the best of all its gifts. Seen from a distance, this famous city, with its white streets stretching hither and thither through the masses of foliage that surround it, gleams like a star of pearl on a mantle of richest green. To the wandering Bedouin, accustomed to his barren rocks and burning sands, it seems set down in the garden of God, and he can well believe the oft-repeated story of his prophet, who refused to pass within its gates, because one Paradise was enough for him.

Let us then visit this city in the heyday of its robust existence. It is evident that something unusual has occurred, for not only are the house-tops full of eager onlookers, but also its narrow and crooked streets are crowded with enthusiastic throngs. We will enquire the cause at this swarthy citizen. With right good will the answer comes—"Naaman has just returned from another of his glorious campaigns. At Ramoth Gilead he has scattered like sheep the combined forces of Ahab and Jehoshaphat. In the battle, Ahab himself, that stout enemy of Syria, has been slain. And this is but one of the many brilliant achievements by which Naaman has made himself famous. Some time ago he utterly broke the power of our Assyrian oppressor, and by the present victory having asserted our supremacy in the west, he has crowned our national triumphs and enabled us to

take our right place, as the leading power in Syria. Surely the man who has done such things is worthy of every honour. You hear his praise on every lip, and even now the king has spread for him the grandest feast Damascus ever witnessed."

You have heard the answer. Let us then push our way to the palace, to behold the festive scene. We near the banqueting hall. Hark! These joyous sounds bespeak a large and eager company. Pass in through the open doors. What a scene! The eye is almost overpowered by the dazzling splendour. The walls are decorated with the gorgeous trophies of many a hard won fight. The tables groan beneath the massive gold and silver vessels and the rich and varied delicacies of the feast. The guests vie with each other in oriental magnificence; and see, conspicuous above all, in closest companionship with his royal master, shines the hero of the hour, Naaman, the captain of Benhadad's host. This is a glorious day for the gallant soldier, and right nobly does he bear his honours. Now think of that illustrious man, the centre of this brilliant company, the idol of his army, the glory of his country, the favourite of his king. Must he not be the happiest man on earth? Yes, if such glory must give gladness, if such honours must yield satisfaction, if such success ensures contentment, if such scenes banish sorrow. But before we answer this question definitely, it will be profitable to consider the elements of Naaman's character and the

causes of his success in life, so far as we have any clue to these in the Scripture narrative; for assuredly, to make one's mark in life as deep as he did, to attain to such eminence, to be such a marvellous success, is no small matter, and we do well, especially those of us who are beginning life, to take note of the conditions of such success, so far as we are able to discover them.

NAAMAN POSSESSED PERSONAL QUALITIES WHICH DESERVED SUCCESS. This is evident from all that we know of him. The man here spoken of was every inch a soldier; energetic, vehement, fiery, yet manly, generous and candid. His whole conduct and bearing are in keeping with the opening words of the narrative, "He was a mighty man in valour." This phrase, indeed, gives us the key-note of his life, and reveals the foundation of all his greatness. It implies far more than the possession of mere animal courage, than which few things are more common. It speaks of the possession of wisdom, forethought, ingenuity, energy, decision, versatility, and all the other high qualities which are blended in the character of a great general. Of these, courage is only one, indispensable, no doubt, and perhaps fundamental, but if alone, positively injurious. A fool-hardy man is of necessity a weak man, weak for want of wisdom. His courage too often leads him blindfold to destruction; he can never be "a mighty man in valour." Naaman was of another sort; he

was wise as well as brave, cautious as well as energetic, and the circumstances of his country gave him abundant opportunity for the display of his military genius. In the wars against the Assyrians and Israelites he succeeded as no other had done before him, and on a small scale might be called an earlier Cyrus. It is perhaps possible that this man may have risen from the ranks, for such advancement, though rare in these early days, was not unknown; and if such were the case, we can easily conceive how by dint of hard work and self denial he fought his way up, step by step, till at last he reached the proud eminence on which we find him, "the captain of the host of the king of Syria." But whether or not this was the case, certain we are, that it must have been by diligence, capacity and bravery; through many conflicts and dangers, and much opposition, that he rose to this high place. He succeeded in life because he possessed those personal qualities which deserved success.

Do we wish to make our mark in the world? Are our souls fired with a noble enthusiasm to be something more than dumb, driven cattle? Is it our ambition to be heroes in the great world fight? The resolve is healthy, stimulating, elevating, and the cloddy soul which has never felt the noble fire has never risen to a consciousness of the dignity of life. But dreams will never gain the end. High resolves are not enough; they must be followed up by patient plodding, persistent effort, and unwearied industry.

There is no royal road to learning, neither is there to success in life; it must be attained by downright hard work. No success is worth the having, that is not built upon the foundation of persevering labour. "Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished; but he that gathereth by labour shall increase." (Prov. xiii. 11.) And it is just here that most men err. Their purposes perhaps are good, their aims lofty, but they break down in the middle of the work, they have no staying power. Guard, therefore, most carefully against giving up any work that is good, against turning back when you know you are in the right path. The temptation to do so comes from beneath, and has made many lives abortive. The devil seeks to do with our works, what he is thought by the Highlanders of Scotland to have done with a peculiar plant which grows among the heather. The roots of this plant terminate so abruptly that it looks as if all the ends had been cut off, and so the saying is, that this was the work of the great enemy of mankind, who bit off all the ends, because they possessed a healing virtue. Certainly this is his manner of working in the spirit world. He will not very much object to your beginning many good things, if you stop short in the middle and bring them to no abiding issue. You can make as many good resolutions as you please, if you never put them into practice. You may attend church or chapel twice on the Lord's day, if you walk like a worldling all the week. You may read a chapter and

say a prayer in the morning, if you forget to be a living epistle of Christ all the day. You may make long prayers in public, if in private you devour widows' houses. You may launch a hundred religious and benevolent schemes for reaching the masses at home and the heathen abroad, if you give them up in petulant discontent at the first discouragement. You may have the soundest creed in Christendom, if in your life it is a dead letter. In short, if you allow Satan to bite off the ends of your good works, he will make you welcome to all the beginnings. Therefore, as those who are not ignorant of his devices, having begun well, take heed lest he keep you from ending well. Finish the work you have commenced, plod on, however wearied, to the very end of the road; and during all your efforts think not so much of success, labour rather to deserve it. Do not dream away your days in glorious visions of what you will sometime be; see rather that you possess those qualities of self-restraint, prudence, economy, diligence, temperance, perseverance, conscientiousness, truthfulness, honesty, which go to the building up of a noble character. This done, or being done, then put all your heart and soul into the work before you, though it be the veriest drudgery, and no fear of the success. It will come in good time, and in such measure as God sees best.

Thus was it with Naaman. He gave his heart and best energies to his work, therefore he rose by genuine

merit. Very likely some of his companions in arms would not think so, especially such of them as had been outstripped in the race for honours. They would say—"what a lucky fellow Naaman is, to be sure—so fortunate—always brought to the front just at the nick of time; after others have done all the drudgery and dirty work, and nothing is left but to go in and win." Nonsense! That is the talk of incompetent idlers; every syllable bears the accent of envy. You have heard of "the ocean line that never lost a life." This line—the Cunard—is said by some to have had a long lease of luck, but it is a luck in which every careful sea-captain that crosses the Atlantic is free to share. I once was present at the inspection of one of these noble vessels on the day before it sailed; an inspection never omitted and always conducted under the eye of one of the owners. After it was finished, and more minute and careful it could not be, the inspecting captain turning to me said, "This, and things corresponding to this, explain what is called 'the luck' of the Cunard line." On similar grounds can we explain what some would call "the luck" of Naaman and of other truly successful men. His high position he had gained by unquestionable merit. Often had he done good service for Syria on the tented field and in the council chamber. Many tales could be told of his personal prowess, of his hairbreadth escapes, of his consummate ability, of his vast resources; ay, and his many scars proclaimed even

more eloquently than his many decorations the secret of his success. Remember in the great battle of life "a pound of pluck is worth a ton of luck." "Seest thou a man diligent in his business, he shall stand before kings, he shall not stand before mean men."

NAAMAN WAS ALSO FAVOURED BY EXTERNAL INFLUENCE. This constituted no unimportant element in his success. He was exceedingly fortunate in having a master who could appreciate his character, and who was willing to acknowledge his services. Sometimes this is not the case; not unfrequently in this selfish world true merit is not appreciated. There are around us good servants serving hard and thankless masters, who can never be too grinding or too ungrateful. Naaman had not this great difficulty to contend with; circumstances were very favourable to his rise. The need of a great general had long been felt in Damascus. The rising powers in the east had already commenced that series of campaigns which culminated in the establishment of empires so vast as those of Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus. Already a wave of invasion had rolled over Damascus, for the then reigning Assyrian king had pushed his conquests thus far east and brought Benhadad into subjection. Only for a few years however, for the Syrians revolted; and it was probably in the war of independence which followed this revolt that Naaman first distinguished himself. Of this, however, we cannot

speak with certainty; all that we know is that he had won renown in many wars, for he was a great man and honoured by his master because he had wrought deliverance for Syria. He was highly esteemed by Benhadad, and therefore advanced to posts of trust and influence. His office, as captain of all the king's host, would combine, as was the custom in the east, the highest civil as well as the chief military power. Naaman would be both prime minister and commander-in-chief, and thus would be consulted in every national emergency. Nothing would be done without his advice; often his opinion would be deferred to. He would hold the strings of all state secrets, and his influence throughout the kingdom would be unbounded.

Such success as this is not common in any day, but perhaps it is more common in our days than ever before in the history of the world. The avenues to outward prosperity have so multiplied, there are so many helping hands stretched out to the really capable aspirant for honour in every department of human activity, that there is very great likelihood of the man of sterling merit coming to the front in the long run. Let him but find the sphere for which he is fitted, and he will in good time reach his own level. Have we not again and again heard of

> "Some divinely gifted man
> Whose life in low estate began,
> And on a simple village green.

Who breaks his birth's invidious bar,
  And grasps the skirts of happy chance,
  And breasts the blows of circumstance,
And grapples with his evil star.

Who makes by force his merit known,
  And lives to clutch the golden keys,
  To mould a mighty state's decrees,
And shape the whisper of the throne.

And moving up from high to higher,
  Becomes on fortune's crowning slope
  The pillar of a people's hope,
The centre of a world's desire."

And what can be done in one sphere can be done, and is being done, around us every day, in many others. In the researches of science and philosophy; in the wide fields of classic lore and native literature; in the stately temple of the law; in the noble pursuit of the healing art; in the roar of manufacture and the bustling activity of commerce; in the quiet walks of elevating and instructive art, how many have risen to the highest fame from lowliest beginnings. How many of this world's greatest benefactors, its divinely honoured preachers, and its apostolic missionaries have risen from the ranks! "Therefore whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might." With good hope let each one labour on, doing service in all things to God, performing his appointed task in this great world workshop, in the fullest assurance that he will in no wise lose his reward.

There is another element in Naaman's success

which must not be ignored, and that is THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD.

Are we to limit the causes of this man's success to these two, Naaman's personal qualities and Benhadad's royal favour? By no means; such an estimate would be miserably defective and inconsistent with the record of Divine truth. Surely the finger of God is here. Is it not He who after all lifts up and puts down; who raises beggars from the dunghill and casts princes from the throne. In regard to success in life, in all the numerous spheres of occupation, are we to ignore God? To suppose that He sits on a lofty throne, isolated and uninfluential, having nothing to do with our earthly destiny, but leaving us each to shape our fortunes as best we may? Nay, after all, He is the Disposer of every lot, the Giver of every good and perfect gift. Though Naaman knew Him not, and had often gone into the house of Rimmon with his master to pay worship to them who were no gods, and who were impotent to grant any good or avert any evil, none the less was the hand of the living God upon him for good. Though Benhadad in his pride and self-sufficiency might consider himself the fountain of all Naaman's honour, still Jehovah was the Great Worker. Naaman and Benhadad were but instruments in His hand working out His purposes; therefore the Divine record runs thus, "By him THE LORD gave deliverance unto Syria." Yes, this is the lesson we need to learn. In all the ups

and downs of life, in the varying fortunes which fall to the lot of different individuals, and to the same individual at different periods, the hand of God is not to be ignored. If there is a special providence in the falling of a sparrow, much more is His hand manifested in all that befalls us. "The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord." Let us rest assured that whatever we undertake in life, except the Lord smile upon it, it cannot prosper: "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it. Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." God in His providence had smiled upon this Syrian. Naaman stands before us not only endowed with rare qualities, and favoured by earthly power, but also blessed by Divine providence.

Let us now, in sight of a success thus solidly reared and Divinely granted, put again the question with which we began. Does such success ensure contentment? Must it of necessity make Naaman happy? No, assuredly no! How can that be? What is to hinder him from being the happiest mortal on the face of the earth? Just one thing, *he is a leper.* Ah, that sad qualification! It is not a dash of bitterness in his cup, but a draught which turns all life to gall; yea, his very honours and successes serve but to aggravate his sorrow, for they make him feel all the more keenly his miserable case. What slave in Syria would change skins with the man who stands nearest

the king. Ay, and he knows well that the dark shadow under which he walks will never lift, but grow deeper and deeper, until he lays what is left of his loathsome body in an untimely grave. Then where will his honour be, of what avail his high success? "The heart knoweth his own bitterness." How many who to outward appearance have all that heart can wish, have some rooted sorrow preying on their souls, and cannot be comforted. When that great physician, Sir James Simpson, received his baronetcy, numerous letters of congratulation poured in from all parts of the world; and perhaps some had envied him his well won honours, and no doubt many must have thought him one of the happiest of men, but at the very time his heart was broken by a great sorrow. The shadow of death had fallen on him, and he sighed out to a friend, "I receive many letters of congratulation, I have more need of letters of condolence." And this is no isolated case. Is there any lot in which there is no crook? Is there any cup in which there is no wormwood? "Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master and honourable, because by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man in valour, but he was a leper." Ah that fatal "but," has it not sooner or later a place in every biography? There is a something somewhere, in our business, in our family, in our home, among our friends, in our hearts, in

our bodies, in our minds, which qualifies all our joy, which casts a baleful shadow everywhere. What a frail plant is earthly happiness, a gourd with many a worm at its root.

I hear the voice of a questioner. "Did you not say that Naaman's success was due to the blessing of God?" Certainly! "Who sent his leprosy?" God. "Why then did He do so; why did He not allow this soldier to enjoy his honours in health and strength? Was not this a taking back with one hand what God had given with the other?" Nay, friend, nay! That leprosy, loathsome and fatal though it was, was God's best gift to Naaman. "How so?" Just because it led him to God. But for it Naaman would in all likelihood have rested content with the things of time, with his fame as a warrior, with his riches and rewards as a conqueror, with that large portion of earthly prosperity which fell to his lot, and never would have come to the knowledge and possession of higher and more enduring honours. That which was Naaman's biggest sorrow turned out to be God's biggest blessing. And so it may be with every one of us. If your trials and losses and bereavements and sickness and disappointments and sorrows lead you to the feet of Jesus you will bless the God that sent them through all time and eternity. These things will turn out to be your great gain, and will load you with an exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

Thus embedded in the beginning of this narrative are useful lessons for all of us. But are we to pass from the passage thus? Are we to seek for no deeper instruction? Surely not. Jesus found in this Old Testament story a warrant for his largest bounty when He began His public ministry; surely then we do no violence to its teaching when we find in it a picture of this world's need and of His saving grace. Sinner! Naaman's sad state is a picture of yours. You have sat here for your likeness. God had you in His eye all through when He directed such special attention to the loathsome disease with which this Syrian was afflicted. In the physical ravages of leprosy we see, as if reflected in a glass, the spiritual havoc wrought by sin. In the ordinances God appointed for the cleansing of the leper, we have a vivid picture of the cleansing work of His redeeming love. In the sight of God and His holy angels this world is one vast lazar-house, with inmates repulsive and plague-stricken. You may not think so; your spiritual vision may be so impaired that you, as is sometimes the case with lepers, may be unconscious of your deformity, but that does not alter the fact. Perhaps, like Naaman, you may be very prosperous, having all that heart could wish, but like him you can have no lasting joy. Do you forget that you are a sinner with an awful doom before you? So did Naaman forget sometimes that he was a leper dying piecemeal. In the heat of battle, in the flush of vic-

tory, amid the congratulations of friends the horrid fact was forgotten. But when the excitement was over, when he was left alone, the sad reality would again overwhelm his despairing soul. So is it with you. You sometimes succeed in forgetting your unhappy state. Engrossed with business, immersed in gaiety, your soul loses self-consciousness; but when you are alone and compelled to think of life and its solemnities, of the future and its possibilities, when you are laid aside from active duties on a bed of sickness, when you are in great peril and death stares you in the face, when you stand beside the opened grave of one you knew and loved, does not the consciousness of your condition press upon your heart with appalling weight. Fortunate, popular, successful, honoured, you may be, but still you are a sinner unsaved, having no hope and without God in the world. Oh, the unutterable wretchedness of your state! a true consciousness of it however faint would be as hell begun. Why will you then allow another moment to pass ere you cast yourself, a worthless sinner, on the mercy of a Saviour God? A leper once cried to Him, "If Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean." The form of the request, casting as it did a doubt on His willingness, was almost an insult to His infinite love, yet notwithstanding, He answered, "I will, be thou clean." Even so, however sad thy case, ere thou hast read another word thy sins may all be cleansed. Oh, trust Him even now! the

matter is one of tremendous urgency. See that splendid feast, every luxury is piled upon the board. Damocles! why art thou so ghastly pale? Why start thine eyes in terror from their sockets? Why dost thou not eat and enjoy the good the gods have sent thee? The miserable man points upward. Behold above his head a glittering sword suspended by a hair. That threatening sword robs the unhappy man of all relish for the feast and fills him with dismay. Sinner, behold thyself. However full thy board thou sittest beneath the suspended sword of God's judgment, one glimpse of which would rob thine accumulated honours and riches of all their power to please. "Rejoice O young man in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the light of thine eyes; but know that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment."

II.

THE CAPTIVE MAID.

"*Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of th life that now is and of that which is to come.* THIS IS A FAITHFUL SAYING AND WORTHY OF ALL ACCEPTATION."

SOLOMON we are told discoursed of the hyssop on the wall as well of the cedar in the forest, and again and again in the word of God, we read the story of lowly as well as of lofty lives. The modest violet nestling at the foot of the great oak and only revealed by its fragrance, must have its meed of praise as well as its stalwart protector.

Side by side must run the record of Israel's little captive, and Syria's famous captain. The misfortunes of the one as well as the good fortunes of the other must receive due prominence. This divine impartiality and the all embracing cognisance it implies, teach, to begin with, the important lessons that no life is too insignificant for the attention of the most High, and that no sphere is too small and circumscribed for the display of principles which will certainly at the last draw forth His praise or condemnation. Therefore how careful should we be so to mould our lives, that when the books of the great assize are opened,

their faithful record shall not be to our shame but to our praise and honour and glory.

We could not well conceive a greater contrast than that which existed between the earthly lot of Naaman and the captive maid. So far as outward circumstances go, they were placed at opposite poles to each other. The one had all that heart could wish, the other had been deprived of all that heart holds dear. Naaman was one of the most successful generals of his day, a man whose very name was a terror to thousands and the glory of many more. The little captive was an obscure and lowly girl, who, in her palmiest days, was never heard of half-a-mile from home. And the contrast between their spiritual condition was just as striking as that between their outward circumstances. Notwithstanding all Naaman's prosperity, he had a rooted sorrow which turned all his honours to ashes; robbed him of true enjoyment, and filled his soul with bitterness. Notwithstanding all her afflictions, the little captive possessed a secret which turned every grief to gold, which ennobled her life, and filled her heart with an ever-failing wellspring of peace. Yea, so full and glorious was the blessing which she owned, that the captive dispensed it to the captain, and thus gave glorious proof that the life and well being of great and small are knit together by the hand of God. Let us then consider the case of this Israelitish maiden.

LET US VISIT HER HOME. She was not born in

a city great and renowned, like Damascus, yet she dearly loved the old homestead among the hills of Eastern Palestine. Humble it may have been, but there's no place like home. See that white cottage nestling among the olive trees, surrounded by waving fields, and sheltered by the hill which industrious hands have carefully terraced and clad with vines to its very summit. There was she born and all her heart's tendrils are twined around the hallowed spot. Every nook in the fields, vineyards and olive groves is familiar to her. She knows where to find each flower in its season. She can tell you where the wild bees hide their honey. Never was there a happier home, for the fear of God is its firm foundation, righteousness is the strong rooftree, and love its blessed atmosphere. Her father is an Israelite without guile, thoughtful, firm, upright. A shade of sadness sometimes falls upon his brow, but only as the summer clouds flit across the ripening fields, and no wonder that sometimes he should be sad, for he knows what sorrow is. He has come through troublous times, like the covenanting days in Scotland, when God's chosen were hunted like partridges on the mountains. The apostate Ahab and the heathenish Jezebel had swayed for many years the sceptre of Israel, and grievous was the havoc which they wrought. Unblushing iniquity stalked erect throughout the land. Profligacy and cruelty ran riot with superstition. The vilest orgies, of which it would be a shame even

to speak, were gloried in as acts of religious worship, while the true worshippers of Jehovah, a small and feeble band, hid their heads in shame and consternation. Through all that trying time this Israelite held fast his faithfulness. He was one of the few who never bowed the knee to Baal. There, in this secluded glen, far from the wicked court of Ahab, and the polluted priesthood of Baal, he continued to worship the God of his fathers. and though he often felt it a great hardship that he could not go up to Jerusalem to worship, as did the tribes of God in the happy days of Israel's unity, still it was some consolation to remember the words of Solomon, at the dedication of the temple, "the heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee, how much less this house which I have built." So this godly Israelite sought to worship God at home, and walk in the path of His precepts with all diligence from day to day. Perhaps he may have been strengthened and comforted by personal contact with Elijah the Tishbite, who was then raised up to resist the evil under which Israel groaned. Certainly the knowledge of his mission must have been his greatest comfort in that dark hour. Some such home as this must have been the heavenly starting point of life to this little maid. Could there be a better? How greatly blessed are they who pass out into the great weltering ocean of active life from such a haven of peace.

CONSIDER HER TRAINING. We can well conceive

what it must have been in such a home. Her father, adopting the words of Joshua, must have said, "as for me and my house we will serve the Lord." So, according to the Divine command, he would carefully teach his children all the laws of Jehovah. He would speak to them of His sovereign, redeeming, separating love, so emphatically revealed in the history of His people. He would dwell on the wonder of His ways with the children of men. How He called Abram from his country and people to be the head of a holy race. How He led and protected the patriarchs in all their wanderings. He would tell them of Joseph and his afflictions; of the iron entering into his soul, and of the Lord delivering him out of all his troubles, and setting him on the throne of Egypt for the salvation of his brethren. The story of the bondage and the mighty deliverance from Egypt; the glorious marching through the wilderness, and the sublime declaration of the law would rivet their attention. He would speak of the mighty deeds of Joshua and all the judges, of the wars of David, and the glories of Solomon. And the story would become more interesting and the children would listen spellbound as he spoke of the works of Jehovah in his own day—the marvellous mission of Elijah, his terrible destruction of the priests of Baal, and the chariot of fire that swept him up to heaven. And he could point to facts which had occurred under their own eyes, which showed that the Lord's hand was not shortened, nor

His promises slack. He could show how God's judgment had overtaken the wicked house of Ahab. He could speak of the work of Elisha, the gracious successor in the prophetic office, of the Titanic Tishbite. He could direct their attention to such wonders of judgment as the destruction of the impious and profane youths of Bethel, and to such wonders of mercy as the raising from the dead of the Shunammite's child. Thus their minds must have been enlightened, and their hearts filled with a holy enthusiasm for Jehovah and His cause, by these daily repeated instructions.

"Then kneeling down to heaven's eternal King,
The saint, the father, and the husband prays.
Hope springs exulting on triumphant wing
That thus they all shall meet in future days,
There ever bask in uncreated rays,
No more to sigh or shed the bitter tear,
Together hymning their Creator's praise,
In such society, yet still more dear,
While circling time moves round in an eternal sphere."

That's the training that tells; training in the truth of God; training steeped in prayer. Would God we had more of it. How many parents, instead of training up their children like tender plants in a well kept garden, allow them to run wild like weeds in a forest. How many make Sabbath schools an excuse for not paying that attention to the moral and religious development of their children which God has commanded, and which they alone can give; for what-

ever the mental calibre of the parent, his or her words have a force all their own, and they are more potent for good or for evil than those of any other. Christian parents in the present day need to be told, and that most emphatically, that the duty of training up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord is one which cannot be delegated to any other; that the instructions of the most efficient and earnest Christian workers are to be a supplement to, and not a substitute for, parental efforts. And all experience has shown that the results are the best, and the impressions the deepest and most lasting, where parental instruction is the rule. As the poet already quoted, further says:

> "From scenes like these old Scotia's grandeur springs,
> That makes her loved at home, revered abroad;
> Princes and lords are but the breath of kings,
> An honest man's the noblest work of God.

Ay, and for the making of honest men, honest from the very centre of their souls, honest because of the implantation of truth in the inner man, what influence can compare with godly home training. It was thus that, comparatively uninfluenced by the commotions of these apostate days, this godly Israelite sought to train up his children, and with what success in the case of his little daughter, the sequel will show.

SYMPATHIZE WITH HER SORROW. Alas that it should be so, that there is room for sorrow as well

as for admiration. Yet so it is. A great cloud is gathering round that happy home. Sorrow is the common portion of mankind, and God has given His children no release. To the home of this Israelite where Jehovah's name was known, as well as to that of the heathen Naaman, affliction comes; and if it was for the good of Naaman, much more must it be for the good of this guileless Israelite. If distance from the centre of government gave them freedom from many bloody and tyrannical edicts, it also exposed them to the incursions of enemies. Hitherto this godly family had been graciously shielded, but one evening this little girl was missing. She was bright and intelligent, thoughtful beyond her years, the joy of her father's heart, the light of her mother's eye. She had gone out on some little errand and never returned. As evening wore on, her parents became anxious and made enquiries among the neighbours concerning her. All that they could discover was, that a company of Syrian soldiers had been seen hovering about the neighbourhood, and the supposition was that some straggling band had pounced upon her and carried her away. So it really was. When she was all alone, at a considerable distance from the nearest dwelling, she was terrified by several rough fierce-looking men who suddenly surrounded her; she could scarcely understand what they said, but she knew too well who they were, and notwithstanding all her tears and cries and entreaties, they dragged her away with them, away she

knew not whither. How sad it must have been to leave her loving mother and her kind father, her happy brothers and sympathising sisters, her merry playmates and the home she loved so well. How mysterious it must have been to one of her simple faith. If God was her God and her father's God and the God of her people, why did He allow this? Was He not the Almighty Jehovah who could do according to His will in the armies of heaven, much more among the inhabitants of the earth. And the Syrians were not His people, why then should she who had put her trust under the shadow of His wing, be brought thus cruelly under the power of the oppressor? These are hard questions, and many such have been put in all ages by the tried and afflicted people of God. A little child can put them, but who can fully answer them? No one in time. Yet we know assuredly that in God's good time He will make all plain. When the printer is setting up the type, a stranger to his work can make nothing of it as a whole. He may recognise a letter, or spell out a word here and there, and that is all. But when the type is put into the press, and an impression taken, then all is made plain, we can read and understand the whole. So is it with our earthly experiences. In time, God is setting up the type of our lives, letter by letter, word by word, sentence by sentence. The characters are inverted and often hard to decipher; what marvel then, that we children of a day can read and understand only a

very little; here a letter, there a syllable, and perhaps occasionally a little word. What marvel that we have but an inkling of the Divine purpose in our lives, that we commit gross blunders and make grave mistakes in our attempts to explain the mystery. But soon the work will be done, the Divine "FINIS" will be inserted at the end of our biography, and when the whole is printed off in eternity, we shall be able to understand it all from beginning to end; and then, as with purged vision we read the record of our completed lives, we shall discover that not one letter, yea not even a single comma, could have been omitted; that the whole work is gloriously complete. Meanwhile, we should be like a farmer of whom we have heard, who put the passage "God is love," upon the weathercock on his barn. "What," said a friend who saw it, "that is a strange place on which to put such a precious text; do you mean to say that God's love is as fickle as the wind?" "By no means," said the farmer. "My meaning, which you miss, is just the very opposite. I mean by that, to say, '*whatever way the wind blows*, GOD IS LOVE.'" The lesson is a good one and much needed. When the south wind blows softly, when sunny skies and gentle zephyrs laden with perfume cheer our souls, we can believe that God is love; but when the hurricane comes down from the blustering north or the biting east, when the skies are dark and dreary, and the singing of birds is hushed, and the flowers in which we delight are laid low, what

shall we say? Has God changed with His changing providence? Has He forgot us? Nay, nay, afflicted soul, whatever way the wind blows, north, south, east, or west, GOD IS LOVE.

This little Jewish maid of whom we speak, though sorely tried, was not without true comfort. Of all the tales her father told, none moved her heart so deeply as that of Joseph. Again and again she would listen to its recital, and the oftener it was told, the deeper the impression it made. Now in her hour of sorrow, she finds in it a treasure above price, her greatest comfort. She felt that her case, sad though it was, was not for a moment to be compared with that of him who was sold by his brethren. A stranger in a strange land like him she was to be, but surely the God of Joseph would not forsake her. Therefore to Him she betook herself, and cast her burden on the Lord.

HONOUR HER STEDFASTNESS. The principles imbibed in her father's house were now and very severely put to the test. Perhaps the most momentous period in the life of the young, is just when for the first time they have been removed from the influences and restraints of home; when their lot is cast among strangers, who are either indifferent in regard to right principles, or positively hostile and desirous of casting down the whole structure that has been so laboriously reared. It is just here, on the very threshold of life, that most are ruined.

> "The canker galls the infants of the spring
> Too oft before their buttons be disclosed,
> And in the morn and liquid dew of youth
> Contagious blastments are most imminent."

If they pass unscathed this moral and spiritual rubicon, the future is bright with hope; for this very fact seems to indicate that already they tread by faith that path of the just, which is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. Whereas, if they fall, it will be with a desperate struggle that they regain lost ground; and even then, the scars and bruises of that fall will never leave them, however all its guilt may be forgiven. Oh you who are starting out in life, you who can look back on homes of piety, you who have left the quiet paternal roof, for the busy city and the bustle of active life, perhaps you are feeling very lonely among strangers. Some court you, some mock you, some care nothing for you. You are heart-sick at times. Be watchful, be prayerful, walk softly, the crisis is momentous. Commit all your ways unto the Lord, that He may direct your steps. Consider how this Jewish maid conducted herself in much more trying circumstances, and learn to imitate her good example.

The Syrian soldiers speedily arrived at Damascus, and as they had found their captive quick and useful, they thought that instead of selling her in the common slave market, they would make a present of her to the lady of their great general Naaman. It was well for the

captive that they came to this resolution. Naaman's wife was pleased to accept the present from their hands. She well knew what sorrow was, and perhaps had shown her pity for the poor trembling captive, when she was brought into her presence, and thus at once won her gratitude.

There were many things in Damascus quite new to this country girl. At first she was quite overwhelmed by the grandeur and extent of the city, and dazed by its crowded streets. She had never seen such magnificent buildings before, and in her simplicity she sometimes wondered where all the people came from, and what they all could do. The more she became acquainted with the city, the more clearly did she see that she had very much to be thankful for. God had given her a kind master and mistress and protected her from many evils. Had it been her lot to have been sold she might have fallen into the hands of those whose tender mercies are cruel. But notwithstanding the strangeness of her surroundings, so attractive to the youthful mind, and the kindness of her mistress, so grateful to the ingenuous heart, her lot was sad. Who can tell the heart of a stranger, ay and that stranger an unwilling captive, in an enemy's land?

A bronzed sailor crossing London bridge espied the cages of a bird fancier filled with home birds. He speedily struck a bargain for the lot. Then deliberately opening cage after cage he let all the birds fly away. The astonished salesman thought this was

a little eccentricity on the part of a tar too flush of cash, and the little group that gathered round enjoyed the joke immensely. But even the tough hearts of the city Arabs were softened, and their eyes moistened, when Jack turned round and said, "Mates, I've just come out of a dungeon in a foreign land. I know what it is to be a captive cooped up within four walls, and I can't bear to see even a bird deprived of its liberty." So, notwithstanding all her comforts, this little captive was often very sad. The sense of loneliness was especially oppressive. Speaking in a strange tongue she found it difficult to talk to her fellow-servants, and quite impossible to unburden her heart. Moreover she soon found out that they had very little sympathy with her. Often she felt homesick, and then it was some consolation to slip up to the flat roof and gaze wistfully towards the white peaks of Lebanon, and wonder if she would ever see her home again. She did not forget the instructions of that home, and there, with no eye to see, she would kneel down with her face to Jerusalem, and pray to the God of her fathers. His word hid in her heart now showed its power. It was bread and water sustaining her fainting spirit, and giving her strength to bear up under her sorrows; it was a wall of fire around her, preserving her from many evils. In that city there were influences which would have overpowered an unwary and an uninstructed soul. There were stately temples and many deities, chief among whom was

Rimmon, the national god, looked up to as "the most high."

The worship of their false gods was carried on with much solemnity, and outward pomp and show. There were imposing processions, attractive ceremonies, and gorgeous festivals, at which the highest in the land, even the king himself, assisted. But this maid abhorred idolatry with all her heart, and gave it no countenance. The ten commandments had a new meaning to her, and endowed her with a strange power to keep from the polluting contact of this heathen worship. They also enabled her to turn aside from many of the popular amusements of the great city, which though very attractive to the Syrians, and considered quite harmless, were utterly at variance with her past training in the truth of the Lord, and the habits of her home. Even in the sphere of everyday duty she found that the old commandments and instructions made her an oddity in Naaman's household. Her fellow-servants were perplexed with what they called her strange notions and odd conceits, her absurd scruples of conscience and ridiculous pretensions. Her adherence to duty, they would call stubbornness; her vindication of her conduct by appeal to Jehovah's word, Jewish bigotry.

But notwithstanding all, she maintained her integrity; a difficult task, as the many that fall bear witness to. Too many, when tried like her, make utter shipwreck. No sooner do they leave home

and face new temptations than they forget all their home instructions and throw to the winds those holy habits in which they had been trained. They would no more think of living in the gay city according to the principles of their godly home than they would think of wearing homespun as they walk the city streets. It is true their parents trained them up to honour the Lord's day, to frequent the house of prayer, to turn a deaf ear to the instruction that causeth to err, to avoid the society of the vicious and profane, to keep far from degrading pleasures. But they say, "it won't do, when you are in Rome you must do as the Romans do. Better out of the world than out of the fashion. These old puritanical notions may work very well in the country, and among the old folks, but they are not practicable here, they don't suit me. I would be laughed at, if I acted up to them." And so the young man ceases to be regular in his attendance at the house of prayer; he likes to move about and hear the other side of the question, and soon comes to the conclusion that it is on the whole much better to admire the beauties of nature, and enjoy one's self in what he calls a rational way, than to be bound down by these antiquated notions. He finds plenty of his way of thinking, and just as the worship of God is neglected, the worship of pleasure and of mammon is attended to. He begins to live for the things that are seen, and, except arrested on the downward path, may turn out a scoffer, a liber-

tine, a rogue, or all three. Few ministers of the gospel will have any difficulty in giving instances of such sad descents, from what has come under their own observation. Surely then you who have just left home and are surrounded by evil influences, should take heed. Remember this little maiden. Honour her heroic stedfastness to the faith of her fathers; the only worshipper of the true God in that house, yea, so far as she knew, in that city; never heeding the scoffs and jeers and laughter, and petty persecutions of those around; holding fast her integrity without wavering—all alone, in a glorious minority of one. Is it not sublime? Imitate her, then, for thus alone you honour her. Young men and women, keep true to the old tried principles in which you have been trained. Beware of loose ideas and loose morals, and remember that in that book which is the divine guide through life, God has again and again given this advice, "My son, forsake not the law of thy mother."

ADMIRE HER SOLICITUDE. She had not been long in the family of Naaman when she discovered that something was wrong. Perhaps she had thought, as do many, that people who live in magnificent houses, with many servants and splendid equipages, must be as happy as the day is long. Therefore she was surprised to find that Naaman never seemed so cheerful as her father, and her mistress was often pale with weeping; she had never seen her mother so. She

wondered what could be the matter, and at last she found out that Naaman was a leper. A leper! She shuddered at the thought, for she knew, better even than these Syrians, what a dreadful disease it was. She knew how the lepers had to keep apart from all others; she remembered some of the laws concerning leprosy, and at first she felt afraid to live under the same roof with her master, lest she should be defiled. Then her heart was filled with sorrow to think that her master and mistress had such a great grief. Some might have been glad when they made the discovery, and would have looked upon this disease as a judgment sent by Jehovah on the spoiler of His people; but the heart of this slave was filled with pity. Perhaps she enquired if anything had been done for Naaman by the physicians and priests and magicians of Damascus, but only to be told that this disease was altogether incurable. But notwithstanding, she could not banish his sad case from her mind. Often at night she lay awake thinking about him and her sorrowful mistress, and praying God to comfort them, and once when she was thus engaged, the thought came like a flash of lightning, "Elisha could cure him." In an instant, the whole thing was plain. He who had brought back to life the boy of the Shunammite could have no difficulty in curing a leper. But would he be willing to cure Naaman? This was at first a hard question; but she remembered that Elijah saved the lives of the Zidonian widow and her son, during the

time of the great famine, and kept her handful of meal from wasting and her cruse of oil from failing till the day the Lord sent rain upon the earth. Surely the loving Elisha would do as much as the terrible Elijah for a Gentile. And was he not the prophet of Jehovah the God of Israel, who had said "I am the Lord God merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth"? The true servant must be like His master.

But even after she was fully persuaded of Elisha's power and willingness to cure Naaman, there were many difficulties to overcome. She asked herself, "How could I speak to these Syrians about the power of Jehovah; they know nothing about it, and would not believe me. They despise me already, and would they not laugh at me if I said that Elisha was able to cure leprosy"? Notwithstanding, she felt that she might venture to speak to her mistress. Yet even when she had resolved to do so she found that she had set herself a hard task. She tried to speak again and again, only to find that her lips seemed sealed and her tongue would not obey her. But the wish to benefit her master, deep down in her heart, grew bigger and bigger every day she looked on his pale face, and at last, seeing her mistress even more sad than usual, she could not restrain herself, but gave vent to her feelings in the anxious words, "Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria, for he would recover him of his leprosy." The mis-

tress listened to the tender, eager accents of the maid. The unaffected pity and the ardent conviction which they breathed, moved her heart in a way unknown for many a day. She did not despise the words of her handmaid; simple, childlike, unassuming they were, and therefore all the more telling. They had not the faintest tinge of sanctimoniousness or precocity, but revealed in every syllable a transparent interest in her master's welfare. If she spoke tremblingly and diffidently, yet she spoke confidently, and only fearful lest her testimony should be rejected. Ah! she need not fear. No word spoken for God, even by infant lips, can return void, it must prosper in the thing whereto it is sent. Love's labour is never lost, even when it is despised. It was not despised in this case. Her mistress took the first opportunity to repeat her words to Naaman, and new hope was at once kindled in the hearts of both. "A little child shall lead them." How often has that word been verified?

ESTIMATE HER USEFULNESS. The calculation must be rough, but it may be profitable. She was more useful to Naaman than all the wisdom of the wisest men of Damascus, than all the might of Benhadad, than all the riches of Naaman himself. She was the only light in the darkness that surrounded him. And why was she useful? Because she knew the truth and spoke it in love. She knew the truth, and without this she could have been of no service. She knew the character of Jehovah and His prophet. She

had perfect confidence in God's power and love, and in Elisha's faithfulness to His master. He could, and he would, if applied to, perform this wonder.

Also she spoke the truth in love. Many who know the truth fail here. Their words, however true, fall upon dull ears, because they come from cold hearts. Because the words of this maid were the outcome of unaffected sympathy they were believed. She did not forget her place in addressing her mistress. There was no tinge of that precocious piety which is often mere impertinence. It has been said with truth that she was a model missionary. Let all who seek to speak for God, imitate her good example.

REJOICE OVER HER REWARD. What a reward it must have been when her mistress told her that Naaman had resolved to ask the king's permission to go to Samaria. How eagerly would she help to arrange and prepare the goodly presents he would take. What a reward! when she saw his chariot actually at the door, and heard the clatter of the horse's hoofs as he and his escort rode away. What a reward! when he returned perfectly whole, his flesh like that of a little child; what a triumphant answer to all doubts and objections. Ay, and what a reward when she heard from Naaman's own lips the confession, that the God of Israel was the only true God of heaven and earth, and that from that day forth he would worship and serve Him only. Surely her cup would be running over. As she had wept with the broken-hearted, in

their day of grief, so now in this day of gladness they would rejoice together.

Are we here to end this idyll of youthful piety and divine fidelity? Can we suppose her reward to end here? Can we imagine for a moment that Naaman, the generous, warm-hearted soldier, who pressed his gifts on Gehazi, would forget her who had been the principal cause of his cure? Nay, it is impossible. Must we not then end where we began. Must we not in fancy follow her who had been dragged away from her home by a ruthless soldiery, a trembling, weeping child, brought back, in the blush and bloom of youth, with a kingly escort, that astonished all the glen, to her father's house; again to nestle unpolluted and unspoiled under the old rooftree, surrounded by love and esteem, and at last to tell to her children's children the story of her childhood's sorrow and Jehovah's faithfulness. And this would always be the blessed ending of the oft-repeated, but never tiring tale: "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of them all."

III.

THE HUMAN PROGRAMME.

"What must I do to be saved?"

IMPORTANT results often flow from insignificant events. A wakeful monarch calls for the chronicles of his kingdom and desires that they be read to him to lull him to sleep, and thus the unrewarded merit of Mordecai is remembered and Haman's plot destroyed. The lever on a locomotive engine is not large, the hand of a boy could move it, but it wakens the suppressed energy trembling in that iron frame, and the express train thundering over the earth is the striking result. So here, the sympathetic outspoken desire of the little maid was the turning point in Naaman's history; her touch of faith set in motion that train of events which resulted in the temporal and eternal welfare of her master. Whenever her words were reported to him hope sprang up in his heart. Perhaps it was faint to begin with, but the more he questioned her the more it increased, and at all events he felt that there was sufficient reason for taking action. The bare possibility of a cure was sufficient to rouse his energy. Surely this earnestness of Naaman is a

reproof to indifferent sinners. How many live year after year utterly careless about the state of their souls. You know that your life is sinful, you know that you have no good hope for eternity; at least you will acknowledge this in a way when the matter is pressed upon you. Yet as a rule you never trouble yourself about these things. What you will eat and drink and wherewithal you will be clothed are matters of supreme concern; your sin, death, the great white throne, eternity, are nothing. O fools and blind, learn a lesson of Naaman. Why did he so readily catch at this hope held out to him? Because he was so deeply conscious of his evil case. He neither loved nor honoured Israel, he had done all in his power to destroy it, but his need was so great that he would welcome help from any quarter. Even so, sinner, if only a meagre consciousness of the misery and hopelessness of your condition filled your heart you would be all anxiety to seek the remedy. There would be no need of elaborate sermons, stirring appeals, pressing invitations; you would listen eagerly to the merest child who could speak to you of salvation. How quickly would your prejudices vanish. Christ crucified would no longer be a stumbling block and foolishness, but the power and wisdom of God. But surely Naaman will rise up in judgment against you. He listened to the testimony of a child, you shut your ears against the perfect word of God.

Watch the conduct of Naaman and see what a man

in earnest will do. He left no stone unturned to attain the desired end. If there is salvation for him in Israel, he is determined to have it. He is resolved to seek, find he must. At once he applied to the highest authority in Syria for help in this matter. He requested an audience with the king, which was at once granted. We can imagine the scene. There stands Naaman all earnestness before his master. He repeats the story he has heard, tells the hopes that have risen in his heart, and requests the assistance of his king in carrying out his plans. Already the maiden has affected Naaman with her own earnestness. "He went in and told his lord, saying thus and thus said the maid that is of the land of Israel." Benhadad listens to his words, stares at him in astonishment, perhaps smiles incredulously at the story, but readily consents to the expedition. He has little or no faith in the possibility of a cure, especially from such an unlikely quarter; however, if there is any hope at all, Benhadad thinks he is just the man to help his servant. "Go to," he says, "let me arrange this matter, never fear! If there is any truth in this girl's strange story, I'll see that you have the full benefit of it. If these Israelites are clever enough to cure leprosy, I'll compel them to cure you." Thus in Benhadad we see man in the loftiness of his self-esteem, in the complacency of his worldly wisdom, and in the pride of his little brief authority. It will be profitable to notice how Benhadad seeks to bring about the cure

of Naaman, or in other words to mark the means which man devises for obtaining God's salvation.

Naaman is provided with a LETTER.

This letter is an imposing and authoritative document bearing the great seal of the kings of Syria. It contains the declaration of Benhadad's royal will. It is the symbol of his power and majesty, and therefore it must not be trifled with or treated lightly. To despise it would be to provoke all his anger. Listen to its contents. "Now when this letter is come to thee, behold I have therewith sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy." That is a document short and to the point, thoroughly business-like in every letter. No words are wasted in preface, argument or apology. The facts are clearly stated, and his wishes fully declared. There is no ambiguity to give occasion for the loophole of an ingenious misreading. There is no hint of any abatement of the demand; no doubt is suggested as to the possibility of a cure; no opportunity is given for delay or excuse of any kind. Plain, pointed, peremptory is this epistle. "Do this or defy me" is its burden.

Let us examine it more closely. Notice the address—"To Joram, king of Israel." Surely this is a mistake. No, the writing is very legible; sure enough it is addressed to Joram. But the Hebrew maiden never said a word about Joram—Elisha, and Elisha alone, was in her thoughts, and his name only on her

lips. Truly this was the case, but Benhadad thinks he knows the best way to go about this business. Who was Elisha? "The prophet that is in Samaria." At once therefore Benhadad comes to the conclusion that he is some hanger-on at the court of Joram as thoroughly at his beck and bidding as the priests and magicians at Damascus are at his. Therefore he concludes that the shortest and best way to attain his end is to address Joram; to command him is to command Elisha. It is a curious thing that at all stages of the world's history we discover proofs of the inability of man naturally to entertain the idea of two co-ordinate authorities, religious and political, existing side by side. He can easily apprehend the Erastian relation in which the State dominates over the Church. He can also grasp the Popish relation, in which the Church dominates over the State. But to see that there is room for the two to exist side by side harmoniously, each absolutely independent in its own sphere, seems to be very difficult.

Naaman is also furnished with MONEY.

Benhadad was wise in his generation. He showed great knowledge of human nature. He knew well that few things could be done without money, and that with money apparent impossibilities were often overcome. The might of the dollar was not less in that day than in this. Money then, as now, was not only the sinews of war, but also of successful diplomacy. "Nothing for nothing" is a rule of universal applica-

tion, not only all the world over, but at all periods of its existence. A heap of gold is often far more persuasive than imperial parchment. "Gold wins a way where angels might despair." Both Benhadad and Naaman believed in the power of money and used it freely to obtain their ends. They were by no means stingy, but rather showed a princely lavishness in their proposed gifts. The rich show the value they set upon health by the high price they are willing to pay for it; therefore let not the poor blessed with good health complain. The rustic who opened the gate for the splendid city equipage looked with speechless admiration as it whirled past him down the shady lane, and as he picked up the piece of silver thrown him for his little service, the boy thought what rapture to be borne along thus with every pleasure that money can buy. He did not see how pale and weary and sad was the face of him who sat therein, he did not hear the sigh which the sight of his rude health brought up from the depths of that invalid's heart. What would he, what would every dying Naaman give for buoyant health. Naaman's gifts were very costly, and show the value he set upon his cure. His ten talents of silver, six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment, must have amounted to at least £10,000. Surely a fatter fee than ever doctor handled from that day to this.

It is clear that Benhadad and Naaman wished to have two strings to their bow. If the letter was fitted

to frighten, the gifts were fitted to conciliate. If the cure cannot be commanded by the one, it may be bought by the other; the idea of its being obtained gratis never entered their heads. Still another element was added as an appropriate means of forwarding the ends in view.

Naaman was accompanied by an imposing RETINUE.

We see from the sequel that this retinue was intended to play an important part in the cure. It was to form an imposing background and impart dignity to the whole transaction. It was to serve as a foil to set off the exceeding greatness of Naaman and his royal master, and to make a profound impression on those who were to work the cure. Here again is displayed a marvellous knowledge of the human heart. The pride that would resent a command, that would be steeled against a gift, can often be conciliated and made pliable by imposing display. Some men are most easily conquered through the eye. A brilliant display of regal pomp and magnificence will take the hearts of some men by storm, and make them soft as wax. These Syrians knew the value of appearances. Such a splendid cavalcade dashing up to any man's door and halting there might well flatter his pride and make him pliant and pleasant to his illustrious visitor. Would not most men when the breathless and excited servant announced such a visitor with such a retinue, come to the door in all haste, bowing obsequiously and radiant with smiles.

No physician or philosopher, priest or magician in Syria could have been proof against any one of these three,—letter, money, retinue, let alone the whole of them.

See Naaman then as he whirls along over the plain of Damascus. Is he not bravely equipped for his errand? Surely he is far more likely to succeed in this expedition than in any other which has led him from home. Let us sum up the items on which he depends for success. He has got a letter in his hand to command the cure; money in his purse to buy the cure; and a splendid retinue around him to patronise the cure. That is to say we have here man's will, man's purse, man's pride, all working together to obtain a certain end—cure for this captain's leprosy. Or inasmuch as this cure is above all, divine, we have here man's authority, man's resources, man's magnificence, all employed to obtain God's salvation. These are the means man devises to attain the desired benefit. What is their character? They are utterly useless, useless each, useless all. One fatal word shows that this is the case, viz., GOD. These would all be useful and profitable if the cure were *man's*, if it were the result of his skill and wisdom and power, the expression of his goodwill. But they are all useless, if the cure is God's; if it is the gift of His wisdom and power and love. Surely this is self evident. No creature can buy or sell, command or restrain, honour or dishonour, the gift of God. Think of the letter

that was written. Can Benhadad or Naaman command Him who doeth according to His will in the armies of Heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth? The very thought is treason. Think of the gold and silver and the goodly raiment. Can the richest of the sons of men buy aught of God Almighty, possessor of Heaven and earth? The thought is impertinence. Think of the retinue. Can the most magnificent of those whose greatest glory is as the flower of grass patronise the King eternal, immortal, invisible, before whom the angels veil their faces? The thought is insanity. How foolish, then, all these preparations of Naaman. They were hindrances rather than helps. He is still in the greatest darkness. He knows not who this God of Israel is. He considers Him to be altogether such an one as himself, or as the gods of his own people. He knows not what is required of them that would worship the true God in sincerity and truth. He knows not that the gift of healing that he seeks is the exclusive gift of the living God, the Creator of heaven and earth. How essentially legal is the human heart. What a clinging confidence it has in the strength of the flesh.

Are there no such fools as Naaman now? Is the race extinct? Would God it were so, but we dare not believe it. Are there not some, yea many around us, who seek to command or buy or patronise God's salvation? Come, let me introduce you to some of them; perhaps I will introduce you for the first time to yourself.

E.

There is your universalist, what does he do but seek to command God's salvation. He says, "All men must be saved, however wicked, hardened, and impenitent they may have been in life and death. However foul their crimes, and fiendish their behaviour, however saturated with sin every thought and feeling, every word and action has been, they must be saved." Yea, have we not heard them blasphemously declare, "A God that will not save all men we will not have for our God." In many ways they make it plain that, Benhadad-like, they would command God's salvation. It cannot be that there is an eternal hell. It must be that all will be restored. Somehow good will be the final goal of ill. Every winter must change to spring. Every sinner must at last be saved. What is this but the sentiment of Naaman's letter repeated more impiously, ay, and after the full revelation God has made, with infinitely less excuse. Such men virtually say, "Go to, God, save all men." You have already said, "The soul that sinneth it shall die." Blot out "die" and make it read, "The soul that sinneth it shall live." You have said, "The wicked shall be turned into hell and all the nations that forget God." You must turn them all into heaven and abolish hell. You have told us that there is a day for the fixing of the eternal destiny and condition of each; when that word will be fulfilled, "He that is unjust let him be unjust still; he that is filthy let him be filthy still." This whole

idea must be reversed. There must be no continuance of evil, but contrariwise its gradual elimination, till at last it is altogether gone. There must be a process whose end can be described in these words, "He that is unjust let him become just; he that is filthy let him become clean." You have written already the sentence that will be uttered over the sinful in the future judgment, "Depart ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." That sentence must never be pronounced, and now those words should be erased from the book and never breathed in the ears of man. You have said of some that they will go away into everlasting fire; you must stop them on the road and bring them back to everlasting felicity. You must make that picture of solemn judgment, which the gospel contains, a farce and a lie, the horrid nightmare of a morbid fanaticism.

Thus do you speak, O sinner? Then you are the true God after all, and you must inform the inferior Power that rules the universe what your will is, and He must obey you. Oh the horrible blasphemy, the unutterable impiety of such a position.

But there are other sinners of a different stamp. Some men who would never dare thus profanely to command God's salvation, think it both right and proper to try to purchase it. They cannot conceive that God is willing and ready to bestow upon them as a free gift all they require as sinful creatures,—forgiveness, a new nature, eternal life, heaven. Therefore,

like Naaman, they come with gifts in their hands, with which they vainly think to buy the gift of God. Most men have naturally rooted in their minds the idea that they must do many things in order to live. "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." This they read, and they conclude that Jesus puts this word into their hands as a key wherewith to open the prison door of condemnation and let them free. Therefore they strive painfully to drag their limbs, manacled with sin, towards that ponderous door, and notwithstanding innumerable failures, think that somehow success will crown their efforts. They do not see that this key hangs at His girdle as the great Deliverer from hell and death. It has never entered their darkened minds that He alone, of all the sons of men, can fit the key of perfect obedience into the wards of the great lock of the law, and shooting back the adamantine bolt of righteous condemnation, proclaim the opening of the prison to them that are bound. They do not understand that deliverance is bestowed by Him as a free gift; that He has already opened the door, and that looking to Him as the appointed Deliverer, one touch of His Almighty hand will break the iron fetters and make them walk forth the Lord's free men. They do not know that Christ has become the end of the law for righteousness.

Now do not think that it is a matter of little moment to seek to purchase God's salvation; it is a sin exceeding great. "Thy money perish with thee"

will be uttered to every self-righteous soul as his offer is spurned by the Almighty. To offer to buy God's salvation is to mock and to throw contempt on all He has done in infinite grace and truth. To think for a moment that we can buy it reveals an ignorance of God and of ourselves far more appalling than that which Naaman exhibited. It is written, "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags," and no age ever required that truth to be more emphatically reasserted than the present. Just as Naaman brought his silver and gold and goodly changes of raiment to purchase a cure, so the sinner brings his righteousnesses, and expects God on that account to save him. But, you say, no one thinks now-a-days of purchasing an entrance to heaven by silver and gold. I am not so sure of that. I have known some who seemed to think that on account of their gifts, whether religious or benevolent, they would stand a good chance in the great day of reckoning. Their number I hope is few, yet I am afraid such do exist. A great many more do trust in their righteousnesses as thoroughly as Naaman trusted in his presents. But what are our righteousnesses? Whatever we present to God in order that He may be propitiated towards us. Therefore these things must be what we think good. No man would ever dare to hold up to God that which he knew was worthless or evil for the purpose of obtaining His favour. Naaman brought of his very best, and so does every sinner who seeks to be justified by his

works. No man could ever say, "O God because I have committed such-and-such sins look favourably upon me." No one would say to the Most Holy, "See, I bring in my chariot all the accumulated filthiness of a life of sin, therefore be propitiated towards me." Such an act would manifest moral insanity in a manner outrageous even to nature. Our righteousnesses then being those things which we present to God for the purpose of obtaining His favour, must be what we consider beautiful and good and precious. They may indeed in themselves be actually good, as were Naaman's gifts of gold and silver and costly raiment.

Let us enumerate some of the presents which man brings to God to obtain His favour. One finds in religious exercises his righteousnesses. Listen to him. "I say my prayers morning and night, and my place in church is never vacant; surely God will accept me." Another says, "I don't believe in these canting hypocrites, for ever whining about prayer and talking religion till one is sick. I know some of your nice long-faced church and chapel people who don't pay me what they owe, and I have no patience with that sort of thing. I believe that if a man pays his way like a man, if he is a good husband and a kind father, he will have a good chance in the long run; as the wise poet says:—

> "For forms of faith let wrangling bigots fight,
> He can't be wrong whose life is in the right."

So your honest respectability and kindness are your righteousnesses.

Still a third says, "I don't believe what that poet says, and would alter the last line of his couplet a little, making it read—

"He can't be right whose life is in the wrong."

He can't be right whose whole life is spent in forgetfulness of what God has given for his direction through life. If God has given us His word and planted His Church on earth, it is that we may have a true knowledge of Him and of Divine truth, and I am sincerely thankful that I have been trained in a Church sound and catholic; and let men sneer as they may, I count on God's favour because I am within the pale of this His holy Church, and believe that those without are left to His uncovenanted mercies." Then your orthodoxy, your connection with an ecclesiastical company which you call the true Church, are your righteousnesses. This is what you like to bundle into your chariot when you go in search of salvation.

And so we may go the round and find that man's righteousnesses present a strange medley. Prayers, tears, repentance, honesty, liberality, sobriety, generosity, kindness, almsgiving, teetotalism, church going, fasting, orthodoxy: all these in wagon loads; a chariot would break down under the burden, for the treasures of the self-righteous are far more numerous than Naaman's. Ay, and you look upon them with

quite as much complacency as did he; often thinking how much they will do to advance your interests. But God looks upon them too, and what are they to Him? He calls them rags, "filthy rags," defiled, loathsome, to be put out of sight as soon as possible rather than to be considered precious. Our costly righteousnesses so far from forwarding our case with Him, actually hinder it, and often publicans and harlots enter into His kingdom before Pharisees and Scribes. Yea, those righteousnesses on which we depend, actually make us less acceptable to God. How can that be? Because He has considered our case, He knows what is needed to remove our leprosy, He knows that we can never work out a righteousness that will satisfy Him, therefore He has provided for us His own. All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags, but His righteousness is a spotless robe, wrapped in which the vilest sinner can stand before Him pure and undefiled. And this righteousness of God is by faith of Jesus Christ *unto all* and UPON all that believe. Christ is God's own provision for man's necessities—the present which alone appeases Him. Therefore he who brings his own righteousnesses omits to present Christ, does not submit himself to God's righteousness, and thus rejects and despises the gift of God.

Now consider how this must touch the heart of God. Were it possible for our gifts to buy God's salvation, there would be no need for God's great

gift. In other words, if we can save ourselves we have no need of a Divine Saviour. Think therefore of the awful position of every one who depends on his own righteousnesses. He practically—that is in the most emphatic and deliberate way—asserts that he can save himself, and that therefore there was no need that the Word should be made flesh; no need for the loneliness and weariness of the Man of sorrows; no need for the agony and bloody sweat of Gethsemane; no need for the bitter cross, the outer darkness, the agonising cry; no need for any of those pains which racked His soul and body. Accordingly, confidence in your righteousnesses is equivalent to an accusation that in bringing these things upon Jesus, the Father was guilty of folly, injustice, cruelty, and that to His only begotten and well beloved Son. Do you wonder then that He spurns from Him all our righteousnesses as filthy rags, worthless, loathsome in his sight, however highly we may value them. In love and justice to His Son, in consistency with His own nature, He cannot do otherwise.

Come, let me take up a parable. There was a glorious estate which a great king had to dispose of. He had bought it at a price so great that only he could command it, or even reckon up its sum. Therefore for any one to think that he could buy it from him would be to make a mock of him. Yet it was the desire of this king that those under him should have a part in this inheritance and be enriched for ever.

They could not purchase it, but he was willing to bestow it without money and without price. On these terms all would have a part in it who applied to him. A certain man heard of this inheritance, and strong was his desire to obtain it. But he would not have it on the king's terms, he thought he must purchase it. So he gathered together all that he had and went to seek the king. He went in high hope, for had he not with him in his chariot the gold of a good heart, the silver of a pure life, and the goodly apparel of a spotless character. Arrived at the palace, he stood before the king and told his errand. The king was full of patience and condescension, and said, "What bringest thou for such an inheritance as mine, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away?" He answered, "I bring with me in my chariot much gold." "Look and see," said the king. He looked, and lo! the gold was gone. He turned to his king in distress, and said, "I thought I had brought with me gold, but it has vanished, and I know not what has become of it; but sire, I have still much silver." "Bring forth the silver," said the king, and he went to his chariot and searched diligently, but no silver could he find. No one had robbed him. He had not lost his treasures by the way; what then could this mean? Troubled and perplexed, he turned again to the king, and said, "Master, master, the silver has vanished like the gold, but I have still with me many changes of fair garments which I can give thee for thine

inheritance." Again with unspeakable forbearance the king said, "bring them forth;" and this time he went with good hopes, for in searching for the gold and silver he had often laid hands on the bulky bundle in which the changes of raiment were wrapped. He opened it carefully to carry them to the king. But, oh, horror! His eye fell on a sight that made him sick. There was nothing there but a mass of filthy rags. So vile were they, so loathsome that he dare not touch them, far less present them to the king. Despair filled his heart. The glorious inheritance can never be his. With tears streaming from his eyes, and unable for very shame to lift up his head, he cried in the bitterness of his soul, "Undone! undone! I thought I was rich, but I find I have nothing, nothing but filthy rags. God be merciful to me a sinner." And what was the answer? The king, when he heard that cry, had compassion on him, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him, and said, "Bring forth the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet, and bring hither the fatted calf and kill it and let us eat and be merry, for this my son was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found."

Do you need the interpretation. Take it as given in the well known verse:—

"Nothing in my hands I bring;
Simply to Thy Cross I cling;

Naked, come to Thee for dress;
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
Vile, I to the Fountain fly—
Wash me, Saviour, or I die!"

Still a third class seek to patronize God's salvation. Not only the Brahmins in India, but some in Christendom, think that, being great and looked up to by their fellows, they are peculiar favourites of heaven. Not a few seem to think that because they occupy positions of distinction in this world so they must in the next. Because everything is bent to their inclination here, they dream that so it will be there. They conclude that because earthly riches and magnificence are a passport to all that man thinks good, so they will be to heaven. Yea, some have not hesitated to say that because they were the favourites of fortune they must be the favourites of God. Have we not heard of a profane woman at the court of one of England's kings, who said of a dead courtier, "Depend upon it God will think twice before damning a man of such quality." Few would put it so coarsely as that now-a-days, but not a few think that some truth must underlie such words. Accordingly, in their ideas hell is only built for the canaille, for the vulgar, mean, common-place throng; the magnificence of the great will supply a lustre and glory which even heaven would be loath to to lack. The pearly gates will be flung wide open to every lordly Naaman with golden chariot, costly gifts, and glittering retinue. Nay, nay; encourage no such

delusion. Into that city nothing that defiles can enter. Not many rich, not many noble walk those golden streets, therefore the voice of warning rings especially in the ears of such, "Go to, ye rich men, weep and howl." In the great day of the Lamb's glory, the kings of the earth and the great men and the mighty men and the chief captains, will above all urge the frantic cry to the mountains and to the hills, "Fall on us and cover us from the wrath of the Lamb." Earthly greatness and magnificence will be no shelter in that day.

The fundamental mistake of Benhadad and Naaman lay in ignorance of the nature of the disease that had to be dealt with. They knew not that it needed the hand of God Almighty, and that man, with all his skill, was unable to touch it. Even so the fundamental evil of errorists of every hue is ignorance of the nature of that disease of sin with which they are afflicted. God alone can remove it.

If you come before God as a man of might, strong in your own sufficiency, puffed up with your own wisdom, you will get nothing. If you come like a worm, having no might or strength, He will tell you that Christ died for the ungodly. If you come like a rich man, He will not regard you; if you come like a beggar, He will fall on your neck and embrace you. If you come like a proud and pompous man, He will know you afar off and hide Himself; if you come like a humble penitent, He will run to meet you, to

give you the best place at His board, the warmest place in His heart. This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them. He fills the hungry with good things, the rich he sends empty away.

Come then, not like proud Naaman, but rather like the humblest of God's creatures, saying—

> "I'm a poor sinner and nothing at all,
> But Jesus Christ is my all in all."

This do and thou shalt live.

IV.

A TRIPLE DISAPPOINTMENT.

"I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible. I will make a man more precious than fine gold, even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir."

Of all the constellations that sparkle in the sky on a winter's night none is more glorious than Orion. Old story tells that when blinded Orion bewailing his sad fate to the sound of the moaning sea, heard the clang of Vulcan's hammer on a distant isle, the hope that help might there be found sprung up within his heart, and guided by the sound, the mighty hunter groped his way through the deep floods till he came to Lemnos. There, standing with dripping garments in the ruddy glow of the great forge, he besought the grimy god to pity him and pour light into his sightless sockets. He had come to the wrong place; Vulcan had no power to work such wonders; but with accustomed good nature, he gave him a guide to lead him to the temple of the Sun, where alone such gifts were granted. The way was long, the difficulties were great, but who can dwell in darkness? and therefore, cheered and guided by Melpomene, who sat

upon his shoulder, the blinded giant struggled on, and reaching at last the palace of light, and waiting humbly there, received the boon he craved. And then, when life on earth was ended, he was placed as the most splendid constellation in the heavens, to guide others to the end of time, as he himself had been guided.

Is not this fable fulfilled after a glorious fashion in the history of Naaman the Syrian? Oppressed with sorrow inconsolable, wrapped in darkness that might be felt, hope was raised in his heart by the words of an Israelitish child, a guide in Divine Providence given him; and if disappointment lay in his path, and at first he stood at the wrong door, the boon he craved was in good time granted, and better far than physical health and strength,—the light of Heaven and the knowledge of the living God poured in upon his soul, and by God's appointment he became a lode star in the firmament of revelation, for the guidance of seeking souls. There he has been shining brightly for many a century. The Son of man pointed out this star of hope to the villagers of Nazareth, to commend the sovereign mercy and the saving might of the living God, and his story, if read aright, will guide us one and all to that eternal glory which grace has already bestowed on him.

We have seen man devising means to obtain God's salvation—Benhadad and Naaman laying their heads together—now we shall see the result of all their plans; it may be summed up in one word—disap-

pointment. Invariably this is the case when man sets about such work in his own sufficiency; he will find that God sends the rich empty away. To all such He declares, "I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible. I will make a man more precious than fine gold, even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir."

BEHOLD HOW NAAMAN COMES.

Is he not bravely furnished for his journey? He carries everything that wisdom can suggest. First and foremost there is the peremptory parchment of his king demanding his cure from Jehoram; then there are his princely gifts of gold and silver, and around him behold that glittering retinue. Certainly he is in earnest, certainly he is on the right road. Every hoof with which his fiery chargers spurn the ground brings him nearer recovery. So far good. But while his attitude is good his trust is wrong. If his face is turned to God's land, where alone is help, his heart rests in the wise provision he has made to ensure success. The right attitude he owes to the captive maid. The wrong trust springs from the devices of Benhadad and his own understanding.

Thus he comes in mingled light and darkness. He is truly guided by God's grace, yet is far from a true knowledge either of his necessities or of God's power and love. Light and darkness, the precious and the vile, the corn and the chaff, are mingled. They must be separated, and here we shall see how. The

process may seem hard and rough, but it is good and necessary.

Innumerable souls are this day in the very same state. They have an inkling of the truth of God. They have a little light and, like Naaman, they use it. They are anxious, they are in dead earnest. But in their minds there is a strange jumbling of the law and the gospel, a bewildering entanglement of light and darkness; a constant hankering after the attainment of salvation, not perhaps altogether apart from Christ's finished work, yet certainly not apart from their own efforts and resources. "Do this and live" is a word which touches them with power. "Believe and be saved" conveys no meaning to their minds and no peace to their hearts. They are still seeking salvation by the works of the law. There is need of a Divine unravelling, and the process whereby their souls are brought to see that salvation is all of grace is sometimes long and troublesome. How many are like Pilgrim as he set out from the city of Destruction, with only a faint glimmering of light, having many vain thoughts and confidences, easily misled by the plausible theories of worldly wise men, plunging into many a slough of Despondency, before they realize the meaning of the Cross of Christ and His empty sepulchre; before they enter into the experience of the eighth of Romans, that glorious and fertile valley of grace nestling between the two mountain ranges of "no condemnation" and "no separation."

On a hot summer's day a minister of the gospel watched a Newhaven fishwife toiling up to Edinburgh with a heavy basket of fish on her back. She stopped to rest, and the good man thought he would try to speak a word in season, for in truth the sight of her toiling up the hot road forcibly reminded him of the pilgrim and his burden in Bunyan's dream. He found his auditor, either from fatigue or some other cause, singularly reticent. He talked about the burden of sin, the certainty of judgment, the necessity of flight, and the deep experiences of an anxious soul. At last the woman broke silence, saying, "I see where you are. You are speaking about that man Bunyan, who put his pilgrim through so many troubles before he came to the cross and lost his burden. I don't believe in that experience at all." The minister thought he had some miserable scoffer to deal with. Speedily he was undeceived. Pointing to her creel she said, "That's a heavy burden, but what is it to a load of sin? It's hard work (a sair fecht) to come up the hill with that load on my back, but it would be harder to get to Heaven with all my sins crushing me down. Under that burden I couldn't move a foot. The thing that made me a Christian was the sight of the cross, where Jesus died for sinners. There I saw all my sins cast behind God's back, into the depths of the sea, and only then did I set out from the city of Destruction and became a pilgrim and a stranger here. I don't believe in that man Bunyan." Thus

spoke the Scotch fisherwoman. And many with her can say,

> " 'Tis the treasure I've found in His love,
> That has made me a pilgrim below;
> And 'tis then when I reach Him above,
> As I'm known, all His fulness I'll know."

Must we say then that the woman was right and Bunyan wrong; or that Bunyan was right and the woman wrong? Nay, there is no contradiction between the two. She spoke of entrance on the pilgrim life, as it ought to be, as it was in her own happy experience. He describes it as it too often is. Recall the case of Luther. He might have sat for the original of Bunyan's pilgrim. What a long severe struggle there was before assurance filled his soul. What a terrible interval between the breaking in of the first gleam of hope through the cranny of that clause in the creed "I believe in the forgiveness of sins," and the outpouring of that flood of day which for ever dissipated the darkness through God's word, "The just shall live by faith." Therefore never despise the seeking soul, however great its ignorance, however tortuous its course.

SEE WHERE HE HALTS. Naaman has at last safely arrived in the land to which he was directed, and now he remembers the directions of Benhadad and takes them for his guide. Everything the Jewish maid had said seemed to have slipped from his memory. And where does this bring him? To the wrong door. Ah,

sinner, when you consult your own wisdom, to how many wrong doors are you brought? You stand a blind beggar before a beggar's door, or perchance at the door of a deserted house where no succour can be found. Pitiful is your case. Now the process of Divine enlightenment is commenced. Speedily Naaman is taught the uselessness of Benhadad's means, and so some of his darkness is dispelled. No doubt the sheet-anchor of all Naaman's hopes was his royal master's letter, therefore it is now produced. Halting before Joram's palace, Naaman's chief officer is sent in with that weighty missive from which so much was expected. The letter was received and read, but it produced a very different effect from what was anticipated. Blank consternation was depicted on the poor king's countenance. He rent his garments in excess of grief. He was driven distracted, and cried in consternation, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy?" He can only think that Benhadad is determined to pick a quarrel with him and find an excuse for invasion. "Consider, I pray you," he said to his courtiers as he made known the astounding demand, "Consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me." Thus you see that this letter, so pointed, so business-like, so authoritative, is not worth the parchment on which it is written. The officer returned to his master and described what had occurred. Naaman in his turn is confounded.

His heart sinks in despair. All his trouble has been taken in vain. He has been utterly misled.

Ought such a scene as this to have occurred? Did not Jehoram in this matter sin very grievously? Here is a Gentile, an enemy of Israel, all the way from Damascus to enquire concerning the power of Jehovah, and this is the miserable exhibition the king of Israel makes. Has he forgotten that there is a God in Israel? Does he not know that there is a prophet in Samaria? Has he such a poor memory for the wonders done on his own behalf, such shortlived gratitude for Divine favours bestowed? Has he forgotten the empty trenches miraculously filled with water, and the thirst of the soldiers of three armies quenched? Has he so soon forgotten the great victory God gave him over Moab? How miserable is the memory of man. Are not most of God's mercies written in water? Surely Joram's forgetfulness, ingratitude, ignorance and despair, show a heart unacquainted with God's ways, a mind that will not receive knowledge, a soul dead in sin. Naaman the heathen soldier did more honour to the God of Israel than did Israel's king. Faith in His power, though mingled with much imperfection, had brought him all the way from Damascus. Unbelief rent Joram's garments. Naaman had only the word of a child; Joram had Moses and David, and the words and wonders of God's prophets. Truly the last is first and the first last. Yet do not think this strange. Many in Chris-

tian lands with exceptionally good opportunities may be put to shame by the earnestness and sincerity of heathen souls who have only an inkling of the truth.

How useless is this royal unbeliever to Naaman. What a contrast there is between him and the Hebrew maid. Think of her simple desire, "Would God that my master were with the prophet, for he would recover him," and then of his frantic ravings, "Am I God." Contrast her helpfulness, and his uselessness. Learn therefore that usefulness in divine matters flows not from place, but from faith. You think you would be very useful if you were very great, very rich, or very powerful. The tiniest rushlight twinkling in the darkness is of more service than the most powerful electric lamp unillumined. The captive helped Naaman, the king hindered him. Beware that ye be not as Joram, a hindrance to seeking souls.

Consider then the scene. There stands Naaman at the door without, confounded and perplexed, not knowing which way to turn; and there is Joram within, with rent garments, on the brink of despair. What have we here? *Man at his wits' end.* Now God comes in. For if man is seeking God, God is also seeking man. Yea, first of all God is the seeker. Ah Naaman, His eye of love has been fixed on thee from all eternity. The mysterious wheels of His providence have been revolving for thy good. He will allow nothing to thwart the outgoings of His grace towards thee. Suddenly, when all are in perplexity, the

servant of Elisha appears. He comes with a message, —a message of reproof to Joram, "Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes?"—a message of encouragement to Naaman, "let him come now to me and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel." How gracious is this interposition! Elisha is not hurt or offended at the slight that has been put upon him. How dignified is his attitude! He magnifies his high office. How Christlike is his invitation! Are not his words those of a Greater? Can we not here catch the accents of the Christ the Saviour of mankind? Have you been disappointed in your search for salvation? Have you reached the verge of despair? To thee Jesus says, as Elisha said to Naaman; "come now to me." "Come to *Me*"; you have made a great mistake, you have gone to the wrong door, perhaps to many wrong doors. 'I am the way, the truth and the life, no man cometh to the Father but by Me.' Come *now* to Me. After you have tried in vain to find help elsewhere, after you have stood in despair before so many doors where no help is to be found, come now; I am not offended, I will not turn you away, I will give you rest. 'Come now and let us reason together; though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool.'"

MARK WHERE NAAMAN IS LED.

He sees the messenger, and learning whence he comes, recalls the words of the maid concerning the great prophet, and at once resolves to turn his back on

the palace of the helpless king and betake himself to Jehovah's servant. Surely all will now be well; there can be no more disappointment. And truly he may have high hope; for though he has no definite promise as yet concerning his case, he has an invitation to come to God's prophet, coupled with the declaration that he would behold the mighty power of Jehovah. "Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel."

But though the prospect is brighter, every obstacle to his cure has not yet been removed. First he went to the wrong door; now we shall see him at the right door but in the wrong attitude. He has more lessons to learn, more darkness has to be dispelled. At the door of the king he has been taught the uselessness of Benhadad's letter; at the door of the prophet he must be taught the uselessness of his money and his retinue. God's prophet will neither accept the one nor even look upon the other. Thus, every false confidence must be swept away ere he experience God's saving might. Why are some souls so long in coming to peace in believing? It is because, like Naaman, they have many false confidences, and often they must be put through trying and painful experiences before they are brought to an end of self, and see that they must rejoice in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh.

Behold this Syrian soldier comes, his face flushed with eager expectation. He dashes up to Elisha's door

and quickly halts. Now is the decisive moment. He arranges himself and his followers for the momentous tableau, and waits with dignified impatience, the wonderful denouement. Suddenly Elisha's door opens and there appears—no venerable prophet to smite the fell disease and make it fly for ever, but instead, an underling, with the meagre message, "Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shalt come again to thee and thou shalt be clean." Ere Naaman fully realized the meaning of these words, Gehazi had vanished, the prophet's door was shut, and Naaman was again alone among his soldiers.

We have seen a king's folly, now behold a captain's. Naaman gazes at the closed door. He can scarce believe either his ears or his eyes. What! Is this all? Have I come all the way from Damascus to be fooled after this fashion? The thing is intolerable. Wash in Jordan! What is Jordan that I should wash there? And who is this rude prophet who sends his servant to command me thus? To be thus, as he thinks, insulted; invited to come to the prophet, and then to have the door slammed in his face, is too much for the high spirited captain whose whisper commands thousands. Anger boiled furiously in his heart, and he turned and went away in a rage.

It has been well said that three words describe the position of Naaman here—"Near yet far." How near is he? How near the fulfilment of his most ardent wishes—that cure which for many years, he had

not even dared to dream was possible. How many difficulties have been overcome. A message of hope has been received and believed; earnest action has been taken; a long journey undertaken; misconceptions to a certain extent corrected. He stands at the door of the only man on earth who has power to heal him; yea, he has received what may be called an infallible prescription for his cure, consisting of two parts, a command and a promise. The command is clear, simple, easy of fulfilment. "Go and wash in Jordan seven times." The promise is short, absolute, unmistakable, "Thou shalt be clean." Certainly the message of Israel's prophet is as much to the point as was the letter of Syria's king. What more could Naaman have this side perfect recovery? Is he not near?

Yet is he far. Outwardly, so far as God and His message are concerned, there is nothing between him and perfect recovery. Inwardly, so far as his own thoughts and feelings are concerned, there is much. He has still to travel a road far more difficult than that which stretches between Damascus and Samaria. Here there are many mountains and hills that have to be made low, many valleys that have to be exalted, many crooked places to be made straight and rough places plain. Many rugged miry pits are there to be filled up, ere God's salvation is attained. This is the way by which he is now coming, and all the while a dense mist hangs upon that bleak path, and a fierce storm rages to beat him back. See the mist of

heathen ignorance. Hark, in his hasty words, the howling of a hurricane of unreasoning wrath. His high hopes blasted, his gifts despised, his magnificence ignored, his pride humbled,—fury works within his heart, and he turns and goes away in a rage. He is as helpless before this outburst of anger as an autumn leaf before the blast.

See also towering between him and God's salvation the cold proud heights of his own ideas and foregone conclusions. "Behold, I thought, he will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper." Yes, you see Naaman had arranged a complete programme of the ceremony that was to be performed over him when he should be cured. It was to be an imposing scene of which he should be the great central figure. Having such ideas, nothing could be more galling than the conduct of the prophet. It completely set aside all his plans, thwarted all his ideas of propriety, and cut him to the quick.

Also stretching between him and his heart's desire, we see the slippery paths of pride. "Wash in Jordan," said Elisha. "Jordan forsooth," said this Syrian. "What is Jordan, and why should I wash in that contemptible stream? What possible good could that do the leper? Have its troubled waters any medicinal virtues undreamt of before?"

Behold, again, there is between him and recovery

the deep miry slough of childish petulance and obstinacy. "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them and be clean? May I not in this matter have my own way? What is the use of all the trouble to which I have put myself, if a bath in running water is the proper cure?

"So he turned and went away in a rage." Sad words these. Away! where from? The door of hope, the stream of salvation, perfect recovery, the knowledge of God. Away! where to? An unhappy home, a hopeless religion, a loathsome life, a premature death, an undone eternity. Ah Naaman, thy name is a mockery. It may mean "pleasantness," but thy life shall spell out "bitterness" to its bitter end if thou goest thus. How sad, to be so near and yet so far.

Where is the root of this great evil? It is here. Naaman comes to God's prophet as a man of great consequence and wants to be treated as such. He thinks a great deal of himself, and wishes Elisha to do the same. He wishes to be dealt with as a great man who happened to be a leper, not as a leper who happened to be a great man. He comes as *somebody*, not as *anybody*. His greatness, dignity, riches, influence, importance, bulk most largely in his thoughts; he forgets his misery, loathsomeness, helplessness, dependance. Hence his rage, and rejection of God's plan of recovery

Is Naaman's error ever repeated? Often. How many come to God thinking a great deal of themselves, and therefore indulging the delusive thought that they will be treated with exceptional consideration and humoured in all their whims and fancies. Such will always be dealt with as was Naaman, for "God resisteth the proud." You would like to come to God as a somebody, a creature of great consequence. You will not come to Him just as a sinner, miserable, helpless, absolutely dependant on His grace. You think you are rich and increased in goods and have need of nothing; you know not that you are poor and wretched and miserable and blind and naked. You would like God to modify His plan of salvation for your special benefit, and make the way to heaven easier for you than for your fellow-sinners. Especially, do you think that it ought to be easier for the rich to get into the kingdom of heaven than the poor. You do not like that passage which says that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Perhaps you had thought that the Revised Version of the New Testament would make matters easier for sinners, learned, polite, refined, and wealthy, and you have been greatly disappointed that it has not done so. You would like God to change His plan of heaven, and have a front door for sinners of quality, and a back door for the harlot, the drunkard, and the thief. No, no,

it cannot be. All the gates of the New Jerusalem shine with the same pearly radiance. No one is more glorious than its neighbour. From whatever quarter sinners come,—north, south, east, or west—they enter by a gate as glorious as all its fellows. Yea, has not the Son of man stood among us and cried—"I am the door." There is only the one way for all. Sinners of every class and condition, rich and poor, polite and vulgar, respectable and disreputable, wise and foolish, learned and ignorant, must rub shoulders as they pass through the same door, or rather must follow each other one by one as they enter in at the strait gate which leadeth to life eternal. Here the rich and the poor meet together, for God is the maker of them all.

But how many around will talk just like Naaman, who said "Behold, I thought." You have been told the plan of salvation; that it is of faith, that it might be by grace. The mystery of the cross of Christ has been explained, the love of God magnified before you, the finished work of the Redeemer plainly unfolded. But instead of accepting God's salvation as clearly and freely offered, you have said "I think something more is required," "I think this mode of salvation by faith alone is much too simple. Moreover, it does not commend itself to my intellect. I do not understand what relation the death of another man can have to my salvation. I think no one can suffer for my sins except myself. I cannot see how there can be such a

transaction as substitution." Just so, Naaman could see no connection between his cure and bathing in Jordan. He could not understand it. It seemed absurd, so he turned and went away in a rage. This was his folly, and so it will be yours if you do not accept God's gospel and cease from your egotistical "I think."

Others say, I have read the Bible, I have studied Christianity, and I think there are many things more attractive in science and philosophy than in Christianity, and that those have done far more good to mankind than this. I think that from many of the world's sages flow rivers of wisdom far superior to the narrow, crooked, muddy streams of Bible wisdom. Just so. You also follow Naaman, who looked with admiration on Abana and Pharpar, and despised the tortuous and troubled Jordan. The Abana of cosmopolitan science, the Pharpar of philosophy, these are indeed something to boast of, but the shallow and constricted stream of Jewish religious thought is beneath contempt.

Still another class say, "While you insist that all I have to do is to trust in the Lord Jesus, 'I think' that in order to be saved a great change in my inner consciousness should take place. I should see some vision or have some rapturous experience, or hear as it were a voice of might from heaven. Or if I do not have such experiences, at least I ought to feel as others have felt. I have heard and read of certain great saints

who had peculiar experiences, and 'I think' that my experience should be exactly the same as theirs. You see my case is very peculiar and a special arrangement should be made on my account."

Thus many speak. Let me remonstrate in all earnestness with those who are thus hindered from falling in with God's plans of salvation. Is it *wise* to talk thus? Man has made many remarkable discoveries, but is he competent of himself to find out the way of salvation, to cure the disease of sin? Has he found out how to put life into a dead fly? If not, how can he possibly put eternal life into a dead soul? If man's thoughts are sufficient to clear up these mysteries, his intellect a competent guide to eternal life, why should God's thoughts on these subjects be given? Why should the energy of the Holy Ghost be indispensable for entrance into life? You think! Cease from talking thus. What right have you to think after the God who has made you has spoken to you concerning these matters. To think, to debate, to contrive, to prescribe about subjects which He has eternally settled, manifests pride of heart, estrangement from His love, rebellion against His will. To say, like Naaman, "I thought," after God has given you the plain declaration "Believe and live," shows that you are utterly at variance with Him. Have you never read "Let the wicked forsake his ways and the unrighteous man *his thoughts*, and let him return to our God and He will abundantly pardon"?

Yet again, is it *seemly* to talk thus? Who are you thus to talk so lightly about God's salvation? Are you not a beggar in this matter, why then should you become a chooser? Is it not an impertinence on your part? Are not you the patient? Is it seemly then for you to insist on prescribing to the Great Physican, ay, and to insist on it after He has accurately diagnosed your disease and given you an infallible remedy? Did God consult you in the old creation, when the heaven and earth were formed by the word of His power? Where wast thou when He laid the foundation of the earth, when He established the pillars of the skies, when He gave the sea its bounds? Wert thou with Him then, and did thy thoughts modify His actions in the least degree? And where wert thou when, in the council chamber of eternity, He elaborated that glorious plan of Redemption by the blood of His Son which is the highest revelation of all His wondrous attributes, the most perfect unfolding of His nature, the angels have ever beheld? Will it be altered or in any degree modified on account of the thoughts of a sinner and rebel such as you? Nay, nay, indulge no such delusion. Naaman got no more than a command and a promise, neither will you. If he had not acted upon the word that was given him he would have perished miserably. If you do not act on what God has said to you, you must perish eternally. Listen to the voice of God "BELIEVE ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST AND THOU SHALT BE SAVED." There

is the command, "believe"; there is the promise, "thou shalt be saved." Thus it stands; the divine and perfect expression of the only plan of salvation. Take it you may. Leave it you may. Alter it you cannot. What then are you to do with it?

V.

WISE COUNSEL.

"He hath showed thee, O man, what is good."

"WHEREWITHAL shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before Him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" This fearful soliloquy, with its agonizing climax, is neither unnatural nor incomprehensible. It is merely the application in the highest possible field of the axiomatic principle, that any sacrifice is wise that entails a higher benefit. And if the soul is what it feels itself to be, an immortal essence capable of highest weal or deepest woe, what can be of more surpassing moment than its state for ever and ever. Every sacrifice in time, however great, must be a gain if it paves the way to paradise. Hence arises the asceticisms, pains, self-mortifications, cruelties of man-elaborated systems of religion.

Christianity does not deny that a great work has

to be done in order that heaven be ours. So far it agrees with other systems. Its peculiarity consists in the declaration that this great work has been done. The gospel is the announcement of a finished work; a cry to mankind to be reconciled to God by the death of His Son. Now if men are ready to do great things in order to win eternal life, much rather should they fall in with God's plan when He says, "Believe and live." Their willingness to do such things condemns them if they reject God's way of salvation.

Such thoughts as these are naturally suggested by the words of Naaman's servants to their disappointed master. They have been silent but interested witnesses of all that has transpired. Elisha, by the drift of his message and by the manner in which it was given, had overturned all Naaman's plans and ignored his greatness, and it was too much for the hasty soldier. White with rage he turned and went away. White with rage! ay, and still white with leprosy. No better for all his plans and pains. Hitherto his attitude has been full of hope, now there is nothing but despair. Up to this point he has been coming, now he is going—going uncured. He had been coming because of his need; he is going because of his pride. He had been coming because he knew himself a miserable leper; he is going because he thinks himself a great man. He had been coming because of his faith in the word of a child; he is going because he has despised the word of God's

prophet. He is oscillating between Samaria and Damascus, Jordan and Abana, health and misery, life and death. What will be the result? Momentous question in his case, and in the case of every undecided soul. How many are, like Naaman, oscillating between God's gospel and their own ideas, God's salvation and man's pretences, life and death, heaven and hell.

At this critical juncture in the experience of Naaman we cannot but admire the wisdom and tact of his dependants, and in the long run we also rejoice in the frankness and honesty of the hasty soldier himself.

LISTEN TO THE WORDS OF NAAMAN'S SERVANTS :—

"His servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had told thee to do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? How much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean."

Surely these words make it evident that Naaman is blessed with good servants. There are few higher blessings; alas, that they are not more common! No class has more frequent or better opportunities of doing good in a quiet way, of making home-life purer and happier; and no class can do more evil, poisoning all the springs of social life. Servants can be like sunbeams, making everything bright and pleasant. They can be like bush smoke; or, worse still, a London fog, making everything dark and irritating.

It is very clear that these men were no boors.

Nothing could exceed the respect with which they address their master. They knew their own place, and they could keep it with becoming dignity and good taste. Even when they set themselves to the very delicate task of challenging his conduct, they were guilty of no breach of decorum. They were so respectful that every syllable told. Surely they teach a good lesson in courtesy. Some blunt natures seem to think that boorishness is faithfulness. Others more waspish think that scolding is honesty, and impertinence smartness. Naaman's servants show a more excellent way.

But other men err in the opposite direction. There are many honey-tongued flatterers among dependants who think only to please, not like Naaman's servants, to do good. The error of such is even more dangerous than that of the former. They are true children of that father of lies who turns himself into an angel of light. Had these servants of Naaman been fawning sycophants, or time-serving hypocrites, who look only after themselves, they would have applauded Naaman to the echo. The policy of such miserable natures is to smooth and soothe their superiors with paltry praise, to stroke them with the hair till they purr again. They are willing to do any work, no matter how mean, so that they may profit thereby. Naaman's servants are of another sort. They had the manliness to have a mind of their own and to speak it out. Had they been mere parasites they

would have sided with Naaman and flattered him in his foolish anger, and perhaps have asked permission to punish the prophet for his impertinence. Instead of this, they could see no just cause for Naaman's anger, and in due time told him so.

And this shows that they were no cowards; men of true principle, men of true courtesy never are. If these men had been cowards their tongues would have been tied. They would not have dared to utter a syllable which gave the faintest hint that they disapproved of the conduct of their master.

Neither were they cynics. They were not indifferent to the well-being of their master. Some servants might have coldly said, "It's all the same to us whether or not he is cured. Why should we trouble ourselves about his state. We are not paid for giving advice. We give what we are paid for, and as little of this as possible, just as much eye-service as will pass muster." Thus argue some unprincipled servants, and had Naaman's been of this stamp they would never have uttered a word of expostulation. Indeed they would have been rather glad of the rage which drove them back to their comfortable quarters at home and the many pleasures of the gay capital of Syria. But these men make their master's welfare their interest. They identify themselves with his sorrows as well as his joys, and they cannot hold their peace. They will interfere to save him from himself.

It is also plain that these men were no fools. It is well to speak the truth. But even the truth will be less powerful if not spoken at the right time and in the right tone. How sensible are their remarks, how irresistible their logic. They possessed a large share of that uncommon quality, common-sense. They know when to be silent as well as when to speak. To have uttered a word when Naaman was in a passion would have been folly. It would only have added fuel to the fire, and defeated the object they had in view by making Naaman determined to reject the counsel of the prophet. Therefore they let him cool down, and quietly bide their time. They knew the man they had to deal with. They knew that, though very choleric, he would listen to reason if taken in the right way; ay, and he would listen to reason from any lips. So they patiently waited and watched, and when they saw him sink back in his chariot, and the old sad cloud settle on his countenance, they glanced at each other as if saying, "Now is our time," and approaching his chariot respectfully addressed him. "My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then when he saith to thee, Wash and be clean." Were not these wise servants? Their respectfulness, faithfulness courage, affection, wisdom, are all admirable. I respect them so highly that I would fain imitate them. I would like to speak to you in regard to the state of

your soul as they did to Naaman about his leprosy. You have taken up this little book, perhaps out of mere curiosity, perhaps to while away a weary hour, perhaps to please a friend. As you have read, you have found that its burden is, "Believe on the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be saved." "Oh!" you say impatiently, "I knew that long ago, there's nothing new in that. I should like to hear something else; something more rational, something more attractive; that is stale." Let me speak to you with all respect. Perhaps you are older, wiser, and much more experienced than I, but I am sure you are wrong in turning your back on God's plan of salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. I know also that this mistake is fatal, it must end in everlasting loss. I would also speak with all plainness, for I am afraid some preachers and writers flatter and encourage you in your wayward and rebellious moods. They assure you that you are quite right in rejecting such a plan of salvation. They tell you that no fatal results can possibly follow. Listen to the voice of God. Beware of these prophets of smooth things, they lure you to your destruction. There is no hope for you in time and in eternity outside of the gospel of the grace of God. Here God declares that He has provided all that you require; He has done so at infinite cost; He has published it to you by His own Son. How can we escape if we neglect so great salvation?

I would also speak to you with all boldness, and do

not think that this is easy. Paul had to beseech others to pray for him that he might have boldness to hold back nothing of God's counsel. If we value your good will and your good wishes, as we do, it is no easy matter to enunciate unpalatable truths; it is very easy to tone them down. Yet there stands the word firmer than the everlasting hills, and we dare not bate a tittle of it, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on Him."

I would speak with all affection. I am concerned about your happiness. Though I know you not face to face, I know that you have a heart formed for God, a heart that cannot be satisfied apart from Him; capacities and aspirations sublime and far-reaching; a future of infinite possibilities either of happiness or misery, holiness or sin. Time, with all its wants and achievements, its disappointments and successes, its perplexities and certainties, its longings and despairings, its griefs and gladness, is passing swiftly away. Death, the ghastly king, sits somewhere in the misty future, how near you cannot tell, ready to lay his ruthless hand upon your heart, and crushing out its life blood, cast you down to dust. Eternity, eternity! the hour of purged sight and fixed doom, of bliss unalloyed, of misery without abatement,—eternity is at the door. And with eternity,—yea, as its first fact,—there stands out the great white throne, the

Divine retrospect of this world's history; when all the dramas of life are summed up; when the dead are judged out of the things written in the books and according to their works; when for every one not written in the book of life one place is prepared,—he is "cast into the lake of fire." For time, for death, for judgment, for eternity, oh! repent and believe in the gospel. Thousands upon thousands can trace with absolute certainty all their happiness in life, their peace in the prospect of death, their boldness in view of judgment, their glorious hope for eternity, to this one thing, faith in Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified Son of the living God. This happiness, this peace, this boldness, this hope may be yours; it is yours if, as you are and even now, you cast yourself on the love of God as manifested in the Lord Jesus.

Still further let me plead with you after the manner of Naaman's servants. If I told you to do some great thing to obtain eternal life, would you not do it? You would be ready for any penance and mortification that might be laid on you so as to attain this end. Every false system of religion takes this for granted. It is this which gives them their amazing mastery over human souls. If then you would do some great thing to enter into life, how much more ought you to fall in with God's plan, "Believe and live." Surely, if it is only an experiment it is easy to try it. It can do no harm if it does no good. Learn wisdom from Naaman the Syrian. Imitate his action

in the spiritual sphere, and for your soul's salvation. It is your only hope.

NOTICE THE RESPONSE OF NAAMAN.

He listens to the words of his servants. He knows that they are in the right. "What a fool I have been," he cries from the depths of his heart. At once he changed his mind. He forgot all about his letter and his riches and his retinue; obedience to the word of the prophet was everything now. Even so must you change your mind. Your attainments and recommendations must be utterly set aside. God's word and obedience thereto must be everything if you would have His salvation.

And changing his mind he changed his road. "To the Jordan! to the Jordan!" is now the cry. He cannot rest till he reaches the appointed place. We may most assuredly conclude that Naaman saw no necessary connection between bathing in Jordan and being cured of his leprosy. But the virtue of these waters was not dependent on this, but on God's appointment. As a matter of fact, the waters of Jordan were in themselves as powerless to heal Naaman as were those of Abana and Pharpar. Everything turned on submission to the Divine will and obedience to the Divine ordinance. Is there a similar difficulty in your mind in regard to the cross of Christ? Is it a stumbling block and foolishness in its relation to your salvation? Is it impossible for you to see any connection whatever between the blood

of Jesus and the cleansing of your sins. We know that, unlike the waters of Jordan, the blood of Jesus has a necessary relation to the cleansing of sin, for "without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins." But it is not necessary, so far as your cleansing is concerned, that you should see that connection. It is sufficient if you believe what God has said and act up to His directions. If you are as utterly in the dark in regard to the relation that the blood of Christ has to your cleansing as Naaman was in regard to the relation that the washing in Jordan had to his cure, that will not prevent it if you only act as he did, according to the Divine directions. Jordan was the fountain God opened for Naaman's leprosy. This is the fountain He has opened for your uncleanness, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin."

See Naaman then on the banks of Jordan. He has to dismount and descend, for God's salvation is lower than the lowest. We have to go downwards, not upwards, to be partakers of it. He had to leave everything behind him,—chariot and horses, soldiers, letter, gold, silver, goodly raiment. Thus have we to renounce our trust in all we are and have in receiving God's great gift. Our word must be—

> "Nothing in my hand I bring,
> Simply to Thy cross I cling."

He had to enter the waters of Jordan unclean and

unclothed, a leper confessed and exposed. So have we to come to the Fountain of life, altogether as an unclean thing, without any cloak of excuse or palliation, but simply as confessed and exposed sinners.

Then had Naaman to wash seven times in the Jordan. Seven times, to show that the application of the cleansing waters was complete. Seven times, even as David cried, "Wash me throughly from mine iniquity." The blood of Jesus must be thoroughly applied to the soul ere it becomes "whiter than snow."

See the grand result. Six times the great captain plunged beneath the flowing waters, while his retainers gazed from the bank with deepest solicitude. Six times, and still no change. The dread disease still asserts its mastery and shows its loathsome signs. For the seventh time he sinks beneath the wave, he emerges, and lo! his flesh has become like that of a little child. He comes up from that dark flood with buoyant step and thankful heart, a new man, as if born again. The astonished soldiers gaze upon their master; no spot of disease remains. The Divine promise is fulfilled. The God of Israel is the God of truth, the God of power, the God of love. Dost thou believe in the Lord Jesus? then at once thy sins are forgiven. Thou art a new man, born again, born from above, born of water and of blood.

How long did it take to work this wonder? At the very longest, supposing that there was a gradual

betterment after each plunge, how swift must it have been. Is not the rapidity of this cure part of its glory? Do not murmur then at those who are suddenly raised from spiritual death to life. Do not say I cannot believe in sudden conversions. Cannot God work in the spiritual sphere as in the physical? Yea, is not this very cure a model of His manner of working in removing the uncleanness of sin? The instant Jesus utters the words, "Thy sins are forgiven thee," they are blotted out as a thick cloud. Remember the jailor at Philippi; one moment a hardened desperate sinner hovering on the brink of eternal destruction, the next moment a kind and tender-hearted servant of God's ministers. That jailor is as much a new man morally and spiritually as was Naaman physically. And it was the same principle in each that wrought the wonder,—faith in the word of God.

It must be so. Did Naaman act up to the directions of God's prophet? then God's glory is involved in his cure. Did the jailor believe in the Lord Jesus? God's glory is involved in his salvation. Do you, friend, do you, defiled and undone, rest yourself on His word of grace? then His glory is also involved in your salvation, you must have eternal life. For if a single soul that puts its trust in Him were turned into hell, then, as the old Scotchwoman put it, He would have the greater loss; for He would break His promise, He would lose His good name, He would

cease to be God, and all the universe would run to ruin.

Come, ye sinners, poor and wretched,
  Weak and wounded, sick and sore;
Jesus ready stands to save you,
  Full of pity joined with power.
    He is able,
  He is willing; doubt no more.

Let not conscience make you linger,
  Nor of fitness fondly dream;
All the fitness He requireth,
  Is to feel your need of Him;
    This He gives you;
  'Tis the Spirit's rising beam.

Come, ye weary, heavy laden,
  Lost and ruined by the fall;
If you tarry till you're better,
  You will never come at all.
    Not the righteous—
  Sinners Jesus came to call.

Lo, the incarnate God ascended
  Pleads the merit of His blood;
Venture on Him, venture wholly,
  Let no other trust intrude.
    None but Jesus
  Can do helpless sinners good.

VI.

LIVELY GRATITUDE.

"What shall I render to the Lord?"

"WHAT shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits to me?" This is the instinctive cry of the soul that has tasted that God is gracious. Every heart that has been opened to receive His great gift longs to manifest its gratitude by outward acts of devotion. Thus was it with Naaman. Rejoicing in the new life Jehovah had bestowed upon him, feeling like a man brought back from the grave, he hastened from Jordan to express his deep thankfulness and to press his gifts upon the man of God.

When he left the prophet's door in such high dudgeon, he little dreamt that he would so soon return, and such an altered man,—born again in body, born again in soul. Had his heart been unchanged there would have been no return to Samaria. Had he been thankless and selfish he would have gone on his way to Damascus and wasted neither time nor thought upon Elisha. Had he been proud he would never have sought a second interview with the man who seemed to treat him so rudely. But so thankful was

he, so humble, that he would rather make an apology for his own foolish anger, than go home without returning thanks. His heart is not haughty nor his eyes lofty; he is as a weaned child. The spiritual change is marvellous, yes, and more pleasing in the sight of God than that outward change which occurred when, rising out of Jordan, his flesh came upon him like that of a little child. The once haughty and imperious captain, by this act and all his after conduct, unfolds the meaning of that deep word "Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven." His gratitude and humility are both beautiful, and expressive of that great inner change which characterizes every child of the kingdom of heaven.

God expects gratitude; is disappointed when He does not receive it. When only the Samaritan leper returned to give thanks for his recovery, did not the Master miss the rest, and ask in tones of disappointed love, "Where are the nine?" "Oh that men *would* praise the Lord for His goodness and for His wonderful works to the children of men."

Returning a new man, Naaman was at once admitted into the presence of the prophet. On his way to the Jordan, defiled with leprosy, he could not see the face of the man of God; but now, ceremonially clean, no barrier is put in his way. Naaman had been brought up in ignorance of Israelitish institutions, and knew not that the presence of a leper

such as he would impart a taint which every faithful Israelite abhorred; a taint which would debar him from many privileges and necessitate many minute and tedious cleansing processes. Faithfulness to the ordinance of God, as well as the knowledge of the disabilities of the defiled, made a pious Israelite shrink from all contact with this disease. Hence Elisha did not admit the leper into his presence. Yet he would not leave him hopeless. Love's sacred ingenuity found out a means of overleaping the ceremonial barrier, and hence the message, "Wash and be clean." Elisha here, like his great antitype when dealing with another alien, the Syrophœnician, acted in mingled grace and truth. Grace sent the sick Syrian a message of saving health, but truth barred the prophet's door against the proudest leper that walked God's earth. Now, however, all is changed. The good news have been believed and acted on, the leprosy is completely removed, and in grace and truth God's prophet communes with the cleansed leper. Communion commences after cleansing. For the defiled sinner there is no communion. He has the message of mercy, and that is all. Only as we walk in the light, as He is in the light, have we fellowship one with the other, and that which maintains as well as begins this fellowship is the blood of Jesus Christ His Son which cleanseth us from all sin. Christian communion is based upon the cross of Christ. Hence that clause in the creed: "I believe in the com-

munion *of saints.*" Souls washed from the leprosy of sin by the blood of the Lamb are alone capable of true communion, and discipline in the Church is the practical acknowledgment of this fact. It may often, like the action of Elisha, look harsh; it may be called persecution, but only to souls not fully alive to the claims of God's truth and the glory of God's love.

Standing in the presence of the prophet, Naaman's lips are moved to utter great truths. He witnessed a good confession. He added to his faith virtue. The confession was public, clear, and outspoken. He wishes all to hear and know; not only Elisha and his household, but also his own retainers. He will have no man in doubt as to his opinions. He knows the true God, he loves Him and therefore he must speak His praise in words that no one can mistake: "Behold now I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel." How strong and sweeping is the statement! What an utter overturning of all the beliefs which up to that time he had cherished. Is he not a new man in soul as well as body? Is he not bravely taking his side? What has led Naaman to this conviction, so sure that he must proclaim it from the housetop? The fact that he has experienced God's saving power.

So is it with every man. Never do we truly know God, until we see Him our Saviour. Therefore we never know God till we know Jesus who saves His people from their sins. The proud

mind does not like to acknowledge this. Groping after God, it sometimes lays hold of a vast but vague idea and dreams it has found Him. Nay! Man's heart will not be satisfied with a metaphysical abstraction, however sublime, any more than with a marble statue of the most exquisite proportions. It is not the living God that we have apprehended. Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? But looking at Jesus of Nazareth we find God—God manifest in the flesh. Looking at Him all through His earthly course, as He pitched His tent among us, we behold His glory, the glory as of an only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. Gazing on Gethsemane, and seeing Him stooping there under the great burden of our sins till the spirit faints, and from every pore of His oppressed body the beads of bloody sweat are crushed,—above all standing at Golgotha and seeing Him suffer for our sins, the just for the unjust, dying that we might live, groaning in unutterable agony that we might sing in ceaseless rapture, pouring out the water and the blood from His broken heart to cleanse us from all sin,—gazing on these things and then hearing this same Jesus say to our souls, "Thy sins are forgiven thee,"—then, oh then, like Naaman, heart melted, eyes opened, soul saved, the cry bursts from our lips: "Now I know."

And the cry thus commenced is often repeated. Perhaps at some great crisis in our history, when our

way has been hedged in like that of Israel at the Red sea and we were at our wits' end, we committed our way unto the Lord, and if no voice from heaven cried, "Stand still and see the salvation of God," our heart hoped in His unchanging love and rested in His holy word. And when we beheld Him doing great wonders and leading us out by a way we knew not, have we not with renewed thankfulness repeated the old words, "Now I know."

Or again, we have been brought into deep affliction. All God's waves and billows pass over our heads. The song dies from our faltering lips. Faith can only groan, "How long O Lord, how long." But in good time the purpose of the Lord appears, the peaceable fruits of righteousness arise. New light breaks in upon our souls through the shot holes of sad calamities, and looking up through them to the face of a loving Father who would have us like Himself, we can say with Job, "I have heard of Thee with the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee." Knowledge, through our afflictions has been increased; increased as by the addition of another sense. Well then may the soul say, with deeper emphasis than ever, "Now I know."

At other times the soul is lifted up into such high communion that things seen and temporal shrink into their own nothingness, and God, and His Christ, and His purposes and work, are viewed in all their glory. We have an inkling of what Paul means when he

speaks about being caught up into the third heavens. Then we fall in rapture at the feet of the Lamb as it were slain, longing to be nothing so that He be all in all. "Now," the heart sings with joy inexpressible and full of glory, "Now I know."

But what will all these rapturous flights and inspirations and outbursts of knowledge be to that which still awaits us? To that which will flood in upon our souls when we behold Him as He is, when we stand for ever by the glassy sea and sing the song of the redeemed? All our past knowledge compared with this will be characterized by weakness, imperfection, one-sidedness. Then knowledge will be Godlike in its perfection, then the soul will cry, as never before, "Now I know, I know even as I am known."

Standing in the presence of Elisha, Naaman has an opportunity for pressing his gifts upon the prophet, and he avails himself of it. His astounding recovery demands some acknowledgment. By the prophet's previous action he was prevented from presenting these gifts as the wages that bought the cure, now he would lay them at his feet in token of his undying gratitude. Surely this was seemly. Had no such desire sprung up in Naaman's heart would we not have concluded, and rightly concluded, that he did not realize how good God had been to him? See then that in praising generous Naaman you do not condemn yourself. He pressed his gifts with the most vehement earnestness upon God's prophet;

what have you rendered to the Lord for all His benefits? Has your gratitude dissipated itself in empty words, has it evaporated in a few idle tears? Oh for a healthy, abiding, earnest, self-sacrificing gratitude.

But if his action was so comely, why did Elisha refuse his gifts? Was it because he did not admire his conduct? Nay, it was because he knew the time. It would have been out of harmony with the spiritual characteristics of that hour to have taken anything from Naaman. There is a time for receiving gifts and there is a time for refusing them. Elisha by this refusal showed that the spirit of God was infused into him. His action was an exquisite proof of how closely he walked with God. His clear eye saw the stamp of grace which the Divine hand had impressed upon that hour, and he would take nothing from Naaman that would blur it, yea, he will smite Gehazi with a curse for marring the glorious testimony by his love of filthy lucre. As Abraham would have nothing from the king of Sodom, not even a shoe latchet, so Elisha will have nothing from Naaman. Such an act would have created a spiritual discord, and spoiled the heavenly melody that then was breathing in the air of this selfish world. Surely the grand truth that was being magnified was grace—pure, sovereign, divine, almighty, undeserved grace. A leper has been cleansed, a leper who is not of the seed of Abraham, cleansed while many in Israel remained unclean.

Surely this was grace. Again God is honouring the faith of that little maid who sent the great Syrian to His prophet. This stranger, this alien, this enemy whom she has introduced by the prayer of faith and the hope of love to the compassions of the God of Jacob, must not go away disappointed though every leper in the land remains as he was before. Surely this also is grace. And so dearly does Elisha love this grace, so highly will he magnify it, that he will take nothing of all Naaman's gifts.

What a contrast is there between this action of Elisha and that of his great predecessor, Elijah! A marvellous contrast, yet no contradiction. Elijah, God inspired, could demand the last meal from a poor widow. Elisha will take nothing from the wealthy captain. The first teaches that God has a right to all, and faith bows to the Divine demand, though to obey seems to the eye of sense to imply the loss of everything, yea death itself. The other teaches that God gives all without money and without price; and who does not see and feel and acknowledge that this is the higher, the more Godlike truth. Give up life, God seemed to say to that Gentile widow, when Elijah gave the hard command. Take life, God said to this Gentile soldier, when Elisha said, "Wash and be clean." Do we not behold in the first LAW, stern, severe, yet truly just and good; in the second, GRACE, benignant, merciful, yet pure and righteous. There is a great contrast but no contradiction between

the law which was given by Moses, and the grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ. True heartfelt submission to the will of God, whether as revealed by the law or the gospel, brings life. The widow of Zarephath, showing her faith by bowing to the Divine command, found life as surely as Naaman. Her barrel of meal wasted not, neither did her cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sent rain upon the earth.

Here Elisha emphasizes the truth of that glorious Pauline parenthesis, "by grace are ye saved," the truth which is perhaps the hardest for the natural heart to receive. The prophet sought to teach Naaman that God would take nothing from him but his leprosy. He would impress upon him, and upon all who should hear his story, the fact that Jehovah saves freely, that He will be debtor to no man in the matter of the soul's salvation. Surely this clear testimony to the grace of God is of the utmost value. What a vivid and abiding demonstration have we here that the principle on which God saves is the very opposite of that which all heathen, we might say indeed, all merely human systems propose. "Nothing for nothing" is their motto. "Everything for nothing" is God's. "Do some great thing" is their great prescription. "Wash and be clean" is God's. Earn life, earn health, earn salvation is their advice. Take life, take health, take salvation is God's proclamation. Friend, on which plan are you depending? Man's

or God's? The matter is one of the utmost moment. It was for this invaluable principle that Elisha refused Naaman's valuable gifts, and his faithfulness here springs from the same root as Peter's vehement spurning of the money of Simon Magus, "Thy money perish with thee,—to think that the gift of God could be bought with money." It is hard for man to believe in pure grace because it is the rarest thing in the world. Hence anything that will magnify it in the eyes of all men is invaluable. Elisha's noble words, "As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none," seen thus as the manifesto of grace, have been of more value to the world than all Naaman's riches could have been, even had they been consecrated to the endowment of the schools of the prophets over which Elisha presided. An endowment at the expense of such a principle would have been a ruinous investment. Hence, though Naaman still pressed his gifts upon Elisha, the prophet remained firm. "And he urged him to take it, but he refused."

Naaman's gifts are firmly refused, and now he makes a request which, though very strange, proves that he is resolved henceforth to be a worshipper of Jehovah. "Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' burden of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord." Now there is no doubt whatever that there was much superstition manifested by this request, yet it is not so

bad as some of the superstitions that have been popular among those who call themselves Christians, even in modern times. What did Naaman wish to do with this earth? evidently to build an altar to Jehovah in his own land. Therefore, though the mode of expressing his purpose was heathenish, the purpose itself was good and noble. To him, just emerging from heathenism, it was the most expressive way in which he could have said "I cast in my lot with you who are the chosen people of the Lord. I cannot dwell with you in body, but in my native land I shall be with you in spirit. Religiously I from this moment identify myself with you; your people will be my people, your God my God." Here Naaman solemnly casts off allegiance to all false gods, and vows that, cost what it will, he will worship Jehovah only. Thus the cleansed leper has become an ardent worshipper. "God is a spirit, and they who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." And who are they? Those who are washed in the blood of the Lamb, they alone. The defiled do not, cannot, worship God.

It is evident also that Naaman has a tender conscience. The difficulties that will beset his path in the future begin to dawn upon him. It flashes upon him in the very act of declaring his determination, that this worship of Jehovah will make him an oddity in Damascus, and that it will require much care and firmness to adhere to his resolution. How quickly is the conscience quickened by the consciousness of

God's love and the knowledge of His salvation. What Naaman was wont to do without the slightest scruple he begins to question. What he used to anticipate with pleasure as a peculiar honour, he now looks forward to with fear as a great trial. With his whole soul he repudiates these false gods that heretofore have deluded him. But even in the act of repudiation he remembers that great state ceremonial when it was his place as chief favourite to support the king Benhadad as he went to worship in the house of Rimmon. He remembers that there he has to bow with him before his god. Will there be anything in this outward act inconsistent with true allegiance to Jehovah? Naaman is in a difficulty, therefore he puts the case before the prophet. Now it is easy to find fault with Naaman, but let him who is without sin in such matters cast the first stone. Who has not been sorely tempted to let principle bend a little to expediency? Who has not sought to excuse himself for taking up a false position? He little knows the weakness of the human heart who will bear hard on Naaman. We must remember that though he is cleansed he is not fully enlightened. He is emerging from the blindness of heathenism and his spiritual vision is not clear, neither are his feet so firm as they will be. He is by no means perfect. How could he be? But one thing in him we must admire, and that is his honesty. He does not quibble with his conscience, he resorts to no subterfuge to excuse himself. He wishes to

keep his conscience clean and sensitive, hence the honest hopeful statement of his difficulty.

Listen to the answer. It is short but sufficient. It is an embodiment of wisdom and faithfulness rarely paralleled and never surpassed except in the answers of Him who spake as never man spake. One does not know which to admire most, whether the wisdom or the faithfulness of the answer. Elisha did not say to Naaman "Go"; that would have given countenance to idolatry. Elisha here does not play the pope and grant Naaman a special dispensation. Neither does Elisha say "Don't go"; that would have dashed down the cup of new born joy from the lips of Naaman and filled his soul with difficulties and struggles inimical to free spiritual growth. Elisha imitates the patience of the God whose prophet he is. He does not expect his own experience and practice reproduced in a moment in Naaman. He does not expect Naaman at once to do exactly as he does and to think as he thinks. In the spirit of God-given charity he is content to wait. Hence his answer, "Go in peace," that is as if he said to Naaman, "Your heart is now filled with peace through the knowledge of Jehovah's grace; now wherever you go, whatever you do, take heed that you never lose that peace which is now your portion." Elisha knew full well that the enjoyment of the peace of God and worship in the house of Rimmon were incompatible, but he left Naaman to find that out himself, as he did in good time. Surely this was wise.

The joy of the newly emancipated soul was not marred, the future would test the reality of his good confession.

To us in this labyrinth of life is the same word given, "Go in peace." This is the clue which will lead us safely out of all its mazes if we never let it go. Many ask in regard to questionable things, "Should I go here or there? Should I do this or that? Is this engagement or that amusement right or wrong?" I cannot answer, I will not answer many of these questions. Here is a more excellent way. First let me ask, have you the peace of God within your heart? Do you answer "No?" Then my only advice to you is, make it your first, your all-absorbing concern to have it. But another can answer, "Yes, thank God, I have His peace reigning in my heart, I know something of the joy of His salvation." To you I say, make it your one aim never to lose that peace; go nowhere, do nothing that will rob you of it. Take to yourselves the advice which Elisha gave to Naaman, "Go in peace." You will speedily find, as he did, what things help and what things hinder in the enjoyment of this great good. "Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God, and the peace of God which passeth understanding will keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Thus does Paul speak to us as Elisha spoke to Naaman. We do well to take heed.

VII.

UNSEEMLY SELFISHNESS.

"*The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.*"

WE have seen the cleansed and grateful Naaman communing with Elisha, confessing his faith in Jehovah, offering gifts, presenting difficulties and receiving directions. All this is beautiful; but now an incident is recorded of a very different character. Naaman the rich Syrian had many servants, and those faithful and true. Elisha, the prophet of God, had but one, the worthless Gehazi. Not unfrequently men of the world are better served than the children of the kingdom. The conduct of this servant of Elisha is recorded here for our warning and instruction. This is one of the beacons God's love has set on the dangerous reef of covetousness, on which so many have made shipwreck. Gehazi was a typical hypocrite, an earlier and a lesser Judas.

THINK OF HIS ANTECEDENTS. He seems to have been with the prophet a long time, and perhaps had belonged to the household of Shaphat, Elisha's father. This would make him all the more useful to his master, for he would be intimately acquainted with all

his occupations and habits. But this long and close connection with the man of God had not led him to imbibe his master's spirit. How frequently is the homely saying fulfilled, "The nearer the church, the further from grace." We may come into daily contact with the excellent of the earth and yet have no spark of their piety.

He was also a very clever and shrewd servant. His eyes were always open and his mind ever active. It needs rather a sharp man to be a successful hypocrite. As an example of Gehazi's insight, recall the case of the Shunammite. She had been very kind and attentive to the prophet, and he desired to show his appreciation of her kindness by doing her some service. Accordingly he said to her, "Wouldest thou be spoken for to the king or to the captain of the host?" The proposal had no attractions for her. She had no longing for public life or courtly splendour. The home circle was the sphere in which alone she coveted to shine, and true-hearted woman that she was, she gave that memorable and beautiful answer which not only breathes her pious and kindly contentment, but also displays her highest dignity, "I dwell among my own people." The prophet, utterly at a loss, consulted with Gehazi, saying, "What, then, is to be done for her?" The case presented no difficuly to the keen-sighted servant. Without a moment's hesitation he answered, "Verily she hath no child, and her husband is old." Verily Gehazi, thou art no fool.

Also Gehazi appeared to be a zealous servant. When the son of this Shunammite died, and she came to lay her grief before Elisha, he ran to meet her at hismaster's command, an d when ordered, hastened to place the prophet's staff upon the dead child. Indeed, in this scene he seems slightly over zealous, for when she, dumb with grief, cast herself before Elisha and caught him by the feet, he resented her action as an unwarrantable liberty, and would have thrust her away had not the man of God said, "Let her alone, for her soul is vexed within her, and the Lord hath hid it from me." Gehazi is more concerned about the prophet's dignity and honour than the prophet is himself, and if skilful in reading character, is too ready to attribute unworthy motives. The Shunammite herself seemed to have an instinctive dislike to him, hence her curt and evasive answers when he enquired concerning her husband and child; she cannot unburden herself to him. Her heart would break rather than seek sympathy from such a one.

THINK NOW OF HIS PRESENT CONDUCT. He began by coveting. All the while the interview lasted his heart was in Naaman's treasure chests. His evil thought was the father of his evil act. And instead of throwing out the covetous desire when it entered, he gave it houseroom and a hearty welcome. He sought to persuade himself that it would be a justifiable thing to get possession of some of those gifts. "Behold

my master hath spared Naaman, this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought." With true Jewish pride and prejudice he looks down upon that dog of an uncircumcised Syrian. Elisha had spared him, Gehazi would spoil him. The prophet's conduct seemed childish folly to his servant. "If the Israelites spoiled the Egyptians, why should not this Syrian be laid under tribute? He was rich enough. He had no need of those things and would never miss them. Yea, were not these treasures brought for the purpose of giving away? Why then should he have the trouble of carrying back to Damascus that which was as good as given. If Elisha is contented with Elijah's cloak, I am not, and I don't see why I shouldn't make a little out of this windfall. Ay, and if Elisha had only taken these presents part of them would have fallen to me, and my wages are not what they ought to be, though no one ever heard me complain. Who better deserves or more needs a perquisite than I? and surely this is a legitimate one." Thus Gehazi may have reasoned with himself. It is always easy to excuse the conduct that covetousness suggests, and when self-interest is concerned the devil will find an excuse for any course of action. Is he not excuse-maker to the whole world.

The more Gehazi pondered the matter the more he encouraged himself. Perhaps he may have been a little doubtful at first if it would be exactly the right thing to do, but the more he pondered it, the more

plainly he saw Elisha's folly and was confirmed in his own wisdom. "Poor simple-minded man," he thought, "what knows Elisha about business and money matters? He has no idea of the value of money. If I did not arrange such things he would often get into difficulties; none of these prophets are good business men. They are far too soft and simple. His scruples are absurd and impracticable, transcendental moonshine. They would never do in a matter of fact world like this. Ay, and I don't know but he is putting dishonour on the ordinance of God by this course of conduct. Has not every cleansed leper in Israel to go and show himself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded? Surely if the seed of Abraham have to offer gifts, much more should this uncircumcised Syrian. Elisha should not be so lenient. His conduct is a toning down of the divine commandment." Thus also Gehazi may have reasoned, for we know that he encouraged himself in his course by a solemn oath: "As the Lord liveth, I will run after him and take somewhat of him." If Gehazi has not learned piety, he has been long enough under Elisha to pick up its phraseology. That is easily done, and there are few things more disgusting. Cant of all kinds is repulsive, and religious cant is worst of all.

Having committed himself to this course, see his eagerness in attaining his end. No time was to be lost, for Naaman had already started. Probably Gehazi had been busy maturing his plans while the

interview with his master was going on. See him now at the first chance slipping from the presence of Elisha. Behold him girding his loins and running with all his might up hill and down dale after the slowly retreating chariot. It was hard work, but what will not man do for a little gold. Breathless, hot and dusty, he was almost giving up in despair, when, at a turn of the road, Naaman caught sight of the runner, stopped his chariot, and waited for his approach. "When Naaman saw him running after him, he lighted down from the chariot to meet him, and said, Is all well?" Surely this act shows the deep humility of this changed man. What at one time he would have considered beneath him to do to Elisha, or even to Joram, he does to Elisha's servant. He sent a messenger both to the king's palace and the prophet's house, while he himself sat in dignified expectation in his chariot. Let king and prophet alike wait on me at my chariot step, he then seemed to say. Now he alights from his chariot ready to meet the prophet's servant on a footing of equality. What a change! His greeting also shows his docility: "Is there peace?" (marg.) he asks Gehazi. The last words of Elisha are the first on his lips. They have been ringing in his ears all the while. Though no more as to form than the ordinary salutation he has heard thousands of times, ever since Elisha uttered them they have been invested with a new significance, for they were a divinely perfect answer to all his perplexities. Therefore he had been

pondering their meaning. This blessed peace, a peace never known by his soul before, was his portion, and what better blessing could he wish for any than to be possessed of the same. Hence the greeting, "Is there peace?" Gehazi answered, "My master hath sent me, saying, Behold even now there be come to me from mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets; give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments." The ready credence Naaman gave to this tale shows how open and unsuspicious was his heart. The story may look a little unlikely, but he does not know the habits of the prophet, nor do we. We know that Elisha was deeply interested in the sons of the prophets and of the schools in which they were taught; and we also know that there are few better ways of spending money than in helping to train those who shall be witnesses for the truth of God and the God of truth. The response of Naaman also showed his generosity. He had not lost the glow of gratitude, and pressed upon Gehazi twice as much as he asked for. He, like an unmitigated hypocrite, must forsooth be entreated to accept what his fingers were itching to clutch.

Gehazi's end was attained. With a light heart he bade Naaman good-bye. Two soldiers were sent with him to carry the ill-gotten silver and raiment, and on the way back he no doubt planned how best to keep the transaction dark. He sought to do so first

of all by skilful manipulation. There was no use in rousing Elisha's suspicions, simple-minded man though he was, and therefore he dismissed Naaman's soldiers at "the tower," probably some snug hiding-place which he had utilized before in questionable transactions. Having thus safely disposed of the spoil, he entered into his master's presence and set about his ordinary duties, but to his surprise was met by the unusual question, "Whence comest thou, Gehazi?" However, he was quite equal to the occasion, and unabashed replied, "Thy servant went no whither." Now he is seeking to cover his deed by barefaced falsehood, and is finding out how many lies are needed to bury one. Very likely, as he thus addressed his master, he affected an air of surprise and injured innocence, as if he could do anything but attend to his master's interests. Certainly his answer might have been more respectful. Generally this tone of injured innocence is a sign of expertness in deceit.

Do you wonder at this man's conduct? I am sure it is not so very rare. How much of the riches around has been got and is kept by just the same means. How often in commercial circles do we hear false tricks excused. How often does ability in business mean plausibility in lying. In the estimate of some, is not a smart business man one who can tell the cleverest lies, and palm off a bad article for a good? How many think that they cannot get on in business without perpetual deceit. One such has said to me,

that if he had not told as many lies as would have filled a chaff bed he would never have made anything. How many sum up a successful commercial career in the two monosyllables, "get on." Get on, no matter how; by fair means or foul, by lying, cheating, swindling, fraudulent bankruptcy, unfair trade, no matter what, by any and every means, get on. This is the positive degree of comparison in the successful life, and the comparative and superlative are like to it. After you have thoroughly mastered the positive there will be no harm in adding to it *er* and *est*, to form the comparative and superlative, and thus your life will be summed up by the words get on, get honour, get honest. The addition of the last two will at a later stage of life be found to be useful and attractive, though at the beginning they would have been a hindrance. After you get on, it will be wise to try to get honour, even as Gehazi became courtier after he left Elisha. The good opinion of your fellow men is something worth having. When you have your fortune it will make life much more enjoyable. It would be uncomfortable to be tabooed by society, even though you are a millionnaire. On the other hand, it is delightful to be looked up to as a pattern of everything that is noble and good. When you take the chair on great public occasions, it will be pleasant to hear yourself spoken of as a paragon of integrity; as one who in this hollow world has risen to such eminence by unwearied industry, marvellous

capacity, and unspotted uprightness. Till you get used to that sort of thing, you may laugh in your sleeve at the simpletons and despise the parasites, but soon you will find out that it is very pleasant to get honour, and perhaps in the long run you will be able to convince yourself that these are words of truth and soberness. Therefore, young man, after you get on, there is no reason in the world why you should not try to get honour, but don't be such a fool as to begin with it. Then when you are leaving the earth altogether and don't know what is to happen to you, it will be just as well to try to get honest. It may help you on your death bed if it hindered you in your business. It was lead on the ocean of active life, it may be cork in the deep waters of death. It was poor policy for time, but it may pay for eternity. How many are moulding their lives after some such plan. First and foremost they seek to get on. By-and-bye the desire is to get honour. Last of all they may wish to get honest. Is there so much difference between these modern merchants and this old-world servant?

But some one says, "you are a little too hard on humanity; you do not know the pressure that is put upon us business men, the keenness of competition in these days, and you will allow that one must live." "One must live!" Sir! I see no such necessity. The time will come when you must die, and if you can't live without lying it is plain that for you that

time *has* come. For we do not know that God wants you to live, but we do know that He does not want you to lie. Do not think that this is a mere play upon words. How many of the glorious army of martyrs might have lived if they had only lied. When brought before their judges the decisive question invariably was, "Are you a Christian?" "Yes" meant fire, or stake, or sword, or the lion's gory mane. "No" meant instant deliverance. The truth meant death; a lie meant life. Is any trial that has ever come upon you to be compared for a moment to that? Then never again urge as an excuse for unfair dealing this word "One must live." Even if it were true that your life hung on a lie, these martyrs would condemn you; but it is not so. Thousands are living and prospering around you, who would spurn such an excuse as utterly false and groundless.

But whether or not deceit pays now, of one thing I am sure, it does not pay in the long run, and if any think otherwise let them ponder this word of truth: "The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death." The miserable Gehazi speedily found out this solemn truth, and sooner or later so will every one possessed of his spirit.

BEHOLD THIS MAN'S SIN AND PUNISHMENT. In doing as he did, Gehazi sinned against his master. Was there not a danger that Naaman would get a false impression of Elisha on account of this act? Would

he not think him weak and vacillating, one who would say and unsay, swear and unswear, a man who did not know his own mind, and who did an honourable thing only to withdraw it? Would it not look as if Elisha were a mean man, who vaingloriously refused in public what he inwardly and greedily desired? What a false light this in which to put the character of Elisha; but the covetous and deceitful care not a pin for the reputation of others, so that their own ends are served.

He also sinned against Naaman. His conduct was fitted to put a stumblingblock in this young convert's way, and alienate his mind in some measure from Elisha and Elisha's God. It would make him and his followers take back a false report to Damascus concerning the grace of Jehovah and the character of His servants.

Above all, he sinned against God. On this Elisha dwelt. He did not speak of his servant's lie, he magnified a far greater evil. Gehazi's action was inconsistent with the thoughts and actions of God, was terribly out of harmony with the Divine purposes, was contrary to the character of that hour. Hence the indignant question by which he revealed his knowledge of Gehazi's sin. "Is it a time to receive money?" Will your thoughts be for ever running on filthy lucre? God has been showing His glorious grace. A Gentile has been learning the meaning of it for the first time. Without money and without price was mercy shown

to him, and now by your covetousness you must mar everything. The sin that obscured this perfect revelation is great and the punishment must be terrible. "The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow." Gehazi set his heart on Naaman's riches. He got them, and lifelong misery to boot. Where was his profit? He gained a little of Naaman's money, and got all Naaman's disease. He may become courtier and tell Elisha's wonders for the amusement of a king, but he went down to the grave with the mark of God's curse upon his body. How often is it so. How often do riches bring a canker which eats into the soul like a spiritual leprosy and renders life a long misery. And even if joy and happiness for a few brief years were the portion of the unjust, still there remains the solemn question of the Saviour, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" Ye whose hearts are set on riches, ponder this question.

VIII.

INSTRUCTIVE INFERENCES.

"*He that doth not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.*"

FROM the time that Naaman parted with Gehazi we never again hear of him till Jesus pointed out his story for our instruction. Yet notwithstanding this long silence we may draw some legitimate and instructive inferences as to his spiritual state from the events recorded in connection with a visit which Elisha paid to Syria some time afterwards (2 Kings viii.).

We began at Damascus, and here we must end. Then we fancied a great feast spread in honour of Naaman; now, not in fancy but in sober fact, the great city is wrapped in gloom. All its streets are hushed, and its daughters of music brought low. Anxiety and trouble are depicted on every face, for Benhadad their great king lies sick nigh unto death. Come, pass again within the palace gates. See the banqueting hall silent and deserted. Let no heavy footfall ring through the lofty corridor lest the sick man be disturbed. Death can enter this stately palace as easily as the mud hovel of Benhadad's meanest

slave. Walk softly into the sick chamber. There lies the king, rich, powerful, imperious, as we have known him, face to face with death. What can he do against this enemy, the greatest he has ever encountered? Will his treasures avail to buy him off, or his strong will arrest his clammy hand? Ah, no, the grizzly king laughs things like these to scorn. Pale, weak, comfortless, anxious, this world fading away, the eternal world coming nearer and nearer—poor Benhadad, thou art in a sorry case! This is the toughest fight though hast ever seen.

Yes, and friend, just such a fight is before thee, perhaps in the immediate future. We may fear death, but we cannot escape him. However unwelcome his coming, it is sure. We may forget death, but doing so we only put ourselves to greater disadvantage. He will steal on us with stealthy steps as from behind, and at one fell blow level us with the dust. Is there any escape from the fear of death? There is. Listen to the dying words of one who had the pen of a ready writer, Frances Ridley Havergal. She said as she lay a-dying, "It is so beautiful to go. I thought the Lord had more work for me to do, but it is not His will. I am going to see Him, the King in His beauty, Yes, my King. I don't want to be impatient to go. Oh yes, it is splendid; I thought He would have left me awhile, but He is so good to take me so soon." Surely that was triumph over the fear of death. How was it obtained? She gives a clue to the answer in

one of her last requests. She desired that her name should be written on her coffin and encircled by the text, "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." That is enough. Here was all her confidence, the open secret of her perfect peace.

Listen to the testimony of another, a man of world-wide renown, the late Sir James Simpson. The passage was quoted "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." He answered, "Well may I make use of these words. It has happily come to this,—I am a sinner needing a Saviour, and Jesus is the Saviour I need. I have mixed a great deal with men of all shades of opinion, I have heard men of science and philosophy raise doubts and objections to the Gospel of Christ, but I have never for one moment had a doubt since I believed. If we could fully understand the Maker of the world or His word it would just prove that He neither made the one nor wrote the other."

Thus with calmness and even rapture have countless numbers of Christ's disciples faced the king of terrors. It is far otherwise with this heathen king before us. Neither his religion nor his philosophy can give him any comfort. He is ill at ease. But see, there is a noble Syrian in attendance on him. Who is this? Our old friend Naaman? nay, it is another, Hazael. Why this change? Surely in other days we hould have found Naaman here. Yes, but things have

not gone quite smoothly since his return from Samaria. We cannot speak with certainty, but there is nothing unlikely in the supposition that he has been supplanted. Indeed, if we grant that there are evidences of a Divine work of grace going on in the heart of Naaman, as seems indisputable, then in the natural course of events there would be nothing surprising in such a change. Elisha's parting words were "Go in peace." This everyday salutation glorified into an inspired answer to all his difficulties became the formative principle of Naaman's life. In all circumstances he strove to be faithful to it. His one endeavour was to maintain his faith in the God of Israel and a good conscience. When he returned to Damascus, unless his words to Elisha were empty breath, he must have confessed with soldierlike frankness the momentous change that had occurred, the new religious position he had taken up. He would darken the door of no heathen temple to give thanks for his recovery. He would lay no gifts at the feet of the false priests who swarmed around. Ay, and when the time came for that great and imposing recognition of the national god, he found that his conscience would not permit him to enter into the House of Rimmon or take any part whatever in the ceremony. Such must have been his conduct had he continued true to the grace he had received, and the fact that from this time his name drops out of the public history of his country is strong presumption that he was thus faithful, that

he was as bold in testifying to the truth as he had been in fighting Benhadad's battles. Sooner or later such faithfulness must have brought him into collision with his royal master, for Benhadad remained, till laid on his last bed, the implacable enemy of the people of God. To a despot like him nothing could be more aggravating than the consistent conduct of a Hebrew proselyte. All Naaman's difficulties of conscience would seem to him unreasonable scruples; his refusal to acknowledge in any way the national gods, insane obstinacy, or utter atheism. He would look upon Naaman as the most impracticable man in Damascus, one utterly spoiled for public life since the time of his strange cure. The fact of Naaman's cure he did not, could not deny, but it failed to convince him as it had convinced Naaman, that Jehovah was the one living and true God. We know that very soon after Naaman's return a new war broke out against Israel, and it is a fact of great significance that in this war no mention is made of Naaman, the greatest general of his country. What is the explanation? Surely the fact that the honest and grateful soldier would not take arms against the people whose God was the Lord who saved him. Benhadad had to conduct the campaign in person and with no success. All his plans were abortive, and he was so often outwitted that he thought there must be a spy among his councillors. Accordingly calling his servants together, he accused them of treachery, saying, "Will ye not show me

which of us is for the king of Israel?" And one of his servants said "None, my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber." Yet notwithstanding this repeated testimony to Divine power and wisdom, notwithstanding his unavailing attempt to seize the prophet, notwithstanding the ignominious surprise and magnanimous treatment of the guerilla portion of his army,—a treatment which so touched the petty chief at its head that they returned home and never more molested Israel,—Benhadad would not be moved from his purpose. His enmity against Israel was not in the least abated. He would neither be convinced by Divine wisdom nor subdued by Divine magnanimity. He would rush on the bosses of Jehovah's buckler. Therefore mustering all his host he went up and besieged Samaria. The city was so sorely pressed that it looked as if nothing could save it from Benhadad's hands. The famished defenders were reduced to such straits that even mothers ate their infants. All hope of saving the city was well nigh gone, when a strange panic seized the besieging army and gave miraculous deliverance. "The Lord made the host of the Syrians to hear a voice of chariots and a voice of horses, even the voice of a great host; and they said one to another, Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come against us. Wherefore they arose and fled in the

twilight, and left their tents, and their horses, and their asses, even the camp as it was, and fled for their lives." All the road to Jordan was filled with garments and vessels which the Syrians had cast away in their haste, and they arrived in Damascus in scattered bands, dejected and weary, as from a great defeat.

Such a national disaster would deepen the disgrace of the fallen favourite and make his position one of the greatest hardship. Was it the knowledge of this that made Elisha appear upon the scene? No doubt he went to Damascus to carry out the commission of Elijah and anoint Hazael king of Syria, but there is no violence done to the narrative by supposing that he also came to comfort and encourage Naaman. Jesus found the blind man who was cast out of the synagogue for his faithfulness, and revealed Himself to him for his comfort, and He does this in all ages to every faithful soul, in conformity with His own word, "Verily I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or mother, or father, or children, or lands for my sake, and for the gospel's sake, but he shall receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions, and in the world to come, eternal life." If Naaman suffered for Him he must have been comforted by Him. What more seemly then that this comfort should be ministered by the hand of Elisha; so that if Naaman made a long journey to the prophet, and had to leave

his door without an interview, the prophet will make the same journey to him to give him consolation and strength in his hour of need.

But another beside Hazael and Naaman is interested in Elisha's unlooked-for arrival. The proud Benhadad, smitten with sickness, fearing he will die, determines to consult this great prophet of whom he has heard so much, and of whose power he has had such marvellous experience. See how affliction changes the heart. In health, Benhadad was in the house of Rimmon and persecuted all who would not bow with him; in sickness he ignored this god's existence. In health, he sent soldiers to seize God's prophet; in sickness, he sent honoured messengers to entreat his help. Yes, a false religion or no religion will do to live on, we must have something real to die on. How many slight the ministers of the gospel and the ordinances of God's house in the hour of health and clutch at them in the hour of death. And how readily such conduct is excused by their fellows. It is only the thoughtlessness of youth. "I have no patience with those who talk about the 'thoughtlessness of youth' indulgently. I had infinitely rather hear of thoughtless old age, and the indulgence due to that. When a man has done his work, and nothing can in any way be materially altered in his fate, let him forget his toil and jest with his fate, if he will; but what excuse can you find for wilfulness of thought at the very time when every crisis of future

fortune hangs on your decisions? A youth thoughtless! when the career of all his days depends on the opportunity of a moment! A youth thoughtless! when all the chances of his home for ever depends on the chances or the passions of an hour! A youth thoughtless! when his every act is a foundation stone of future conduct, and every imagination a fountain of life or death! Be thoughtless in any after years rather than now, though indeed there is only one place where a man may be nobly thoughtless—his death bed. No thinking should ever be left to be done there."

This noble thoughtlessness is not the portion of Benhadad. He sends to Elisha magnificent presents on forty burdened camels, and by the lips of his most honoured messengers, and in the most submissive tones, puts the hard question, "Shall I recover of this disease?" Elisha's answer sounds enigmatical: "Thou mayest certainly recover, howbeit he shall surely die." But the explanation is easy. The disease with which the king was afflicted was not in itself fatal, yet the hour of his death by vile ingratitude and treachery is at hand. Hazael hears the prophet's answer, and true hypocrite that he was, stands before Elisha with downcast countenance as if overwhelmed with grief at the sad announcement. But the prophet reading his heart, as he read the heart of that other hypocrite, Gehazi, looked him straight in the face; looked with a look so keen, and pene-

trating that at last the blush mantled on Hazael's cheek, and he is convinced that his hypocrisy is unveiled, and his feigned sorrow despised. The calm holy eye of the man of God stirs even the hardened conscience of this hypocrite and makes him blush for very shame. The effect is all the more powerful because Elisha's look, though keen, was not so much one of anger as of sorrow; a look which at length melted into tears, tears which for the time seemed to touch even Hazael's hard heart, and made him put the question, "Why weepeth my lord?" Slowly and solemnly the answer came: "Because I know the evil thou wilt do unto the children of Israel." Hazael is greatly relieved by the answer. It does not thwart his plans, it rather assures success, and so elated is he, so friendly is the feeling he entertains towards this prophet who has brought him good news, and this nation to which he belongs, that with unfeigned surprise he exclaims, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?" He thinks he will neither be strong enough nor wicked enough to do such a barbarous deed. As to strength, Elisha answered, "Thou shalt be king over Syria;" as to wickedness, "The heart is deceitful above all things," though man unregenerate always thinks himself infinitely better than he is; therefore the word of the prophet stands firm.

On fire with ambition Hazael returned from the prophet. He is eager to anticipate Providence and

determined to clutch at the crown within his reach. Accordingly, having told his master that his recovery was certain, on the very next day he followed the father of lies a step further and became a murderer. With pretended kindness and unmixed baseness he took a thick cloth and dipped it in water as if to cool Benhadad's fevered brow, but instead he spread it on his face to suffocate him. Feeble and short was the sick man's struggle for life. Soon all was over. That pallid piece of clay is all that is left of the king. What an end to the unhappy Benhadad! What a Nemesis! Could faithful Naaman have acted thus? When will men learn wisdom? How long will they be in seeing that the principle that dare not trifle with conscience may be troublesome, but is trustworthy? Naaman's scruples may have been annoying, but Hazael's hypocrisy has proved fatal. Surely standing beside that deathbed we learn how much better than sleek hypocrisy which merely seeks its own, is the unbending faithfulness that dare not dishonour God.

And this dark deed was the act of him who cried a day before, "Is thy servant a dog?" How speedy was the fall, how true is that word, "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murder;" between the thought and the deed, how swift may be the transition if the opportunity serves. "Is thy servant a dog?" No dog ever fawned more abjectly on his master than he did, and no dog ever turned upon a master more *ferociously*. Let no one trust in the goodness of his

heart or make a boast of it. "The heart is deceitful above all things and incurably wicked, who can know it?" We must be born again; a new heart and a right spirit must be put within us ere we can have strength to resist temptation, ere we can either see or enter into that kingdom of heaven which is righteousness and peace.

What thought Hazael of the cruel deed? The hour of triumph has come, who cares for sentiment? He took the crown from the head of his murdered master, and it may be with little or no remorse ascended and sat upon his throne. Whether or not his crime was ever known, there cannot be a doubt that thousands admired and envied his power and splendour. Looking upon it as it grew wider and brighter, some may have recalled the former renown of Naaman, his unrivalled promise and sudden eclipse. Perhaps the wiseacres would nod their heads and say profoundly "It is always the unlikely that occurs," and no doubt in their heart of hearts they had despised the man who for such paltry scruples had cast away the chance of such a glorious lot. But at this distance of time, who does not feel that the righteous obscurity of Naaman is more to be desired than the iniquitous splendour of Hazael, and that far better than the pomp and power of gilded sin is the peace of a heart that walks with God. And it is thus we part with Naaman. He vanishes from the field of history when others less worthy come into prominence.

Had not his heart been changed we must have heard of him again. Such a name as his could not have been blotted out of the history of his country at such a time without a cause. Do we not get the explanation of this fact in the prophet's parting counsel, "Go in peace," and in Naaman's deep and true, Amen. Thus he drops out of view. And if higher earthly fame is not his portion, yea, if he is persecuted for righteousness' sake, what matters it? The blessing of God rests upon him. The obscurity that rises from faithfulness to God is more honourable than the widest fame; yea the most obscure and thorny path where souls walk on in peace with God, leads to praise and honour and glory that never fade away. When the wicked arise to shame and everlasting contempt the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

Friend, after all, do you not think that the best wish for any one of us, for time as well as for eternity, can be summed up in the prophet's farewell to Naaman: "Go in peace"; and whatever trouble and obscurity on our part a true response may imply, it is our highest privilege. GO IN PEACE. As we listen to these words are we not irresistibly reminded of a Greater than Elisha? Do not our thoughts pass onward and upward from the type to the antitype, from the man of God to the Messiah. Are not these the words of Jesus, His words to every feeble and defiled sinner *that puts* his trust in Him? He spoke them to that

trembling woman healed of a disease as incurable as Naaman's by touching the hem of His garment. He spoke them again to that sinner of the city who bathed His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Do you feel as weak as the one, as worthless as the other? Touch but the hem of His garment. Steal with broken heart to Him, and cast yourself at His feet. He will not spurn thee, He will bless thee. To thee as well as to them He will speak that word of eternal blessedness: "Thy faith hath saved thee, GO IN PEACE."

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